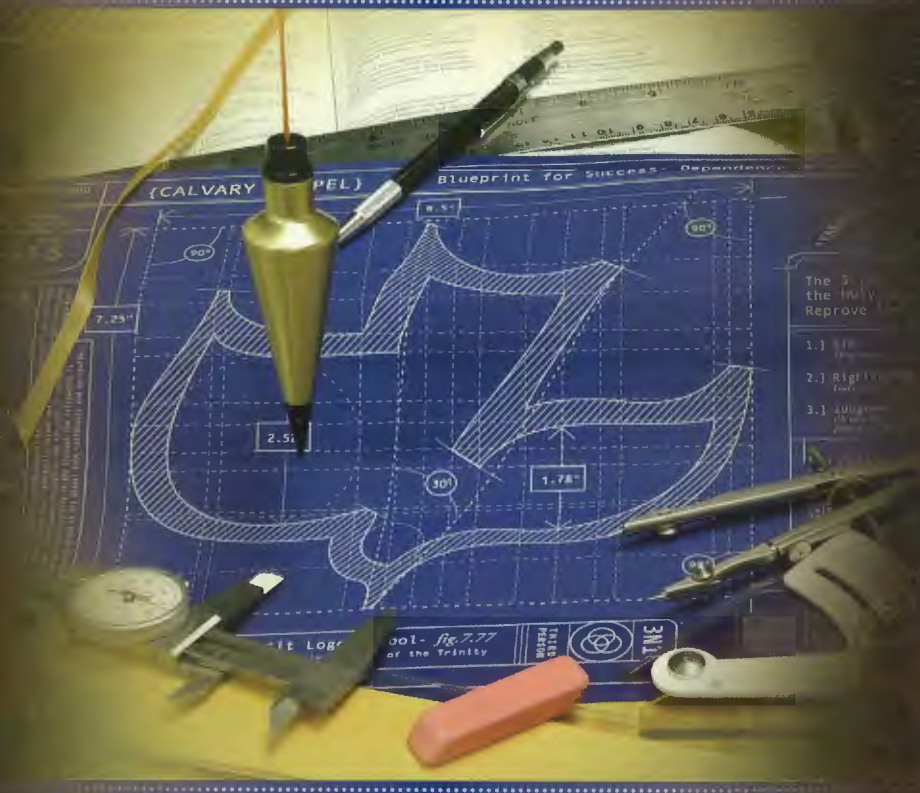


The Foundational Principles of the Calvary Chapel Movement

CALVARY CHAPEL

DISTINCTIVES

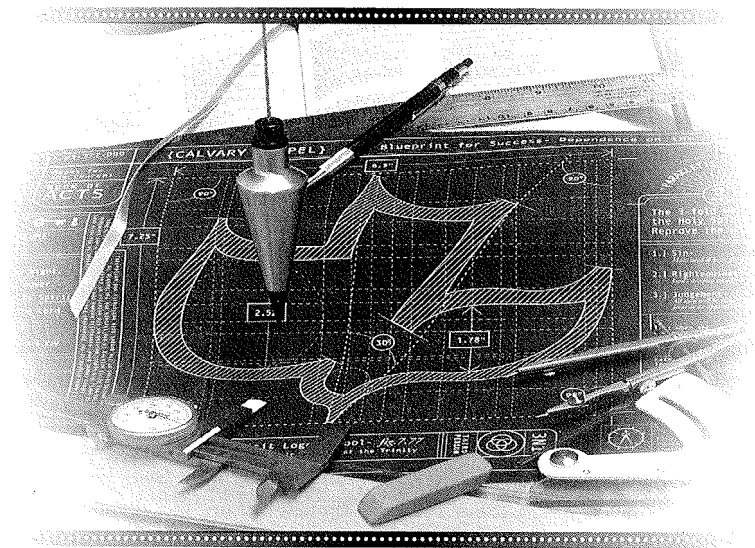


Chuck Smith

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THE WORD
FOR TODAY

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CALVARY CHAPEL DISTINCTIVES

by Chuck Smith

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PREFACE

What makes Calvary Chapel different from other Bible-believing, evangelical churches? It's always good to have a grasp of the unique work that God has done in this fellowship. If Calvary Chapel is exactly like the church across the street, it would be better to simply merge the two. But if there are distinctives that make it different, then it has a unique and special place in the plan of God. Certainly there are churches that share many of our beliefs and practices. We're not renegades. Yet God has done a wonderful work of balance in the Calvary Chapel movement that does make it different in many areas.

There are many who believe in the gifts and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but do not have a strong emphasis on biblical teaching, nor look to the Word of God to guide their experiences with the Holy Spirit. There are those who have a strong emphasis on teaching the Word of God, but do not share the view that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available and valid today. In Calvary Chapel we teach the Word and keep an open heart to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is this balance that makes Calvary Chapel a distinct and uniquely blessed movement of God. And so it's important to understand the biblical principles that make up the picture of why God has allowed Calvary Chapel to exist and grow.

This is not to say that all Calvary Chapels are identical. I'm always amazed at how God can take simple, basic elements and create such variety out of them. Basically, all of us have two eyes, a nose, a mouth, and two ears, and yet how different we all look from each other. People also have different emotional make-ups. Now, God loves everyone. He loves the highly emotional and He loves the dull and unemotional.

In the same way, wanting all men to be able to relate to Him, God created a wide variety of churches. Some churches appeal to those who are very emotional in their nature, while others appeal to a more staid and formal personality. Desiring to reach and bless all kinds of people, God seems to enjoy having diverse churches so that everybody's needs might be met—from the highly emotional to the very formal, and all those in between. Each of us has a part to play in God's plan, but we all need to know where we fit in this wide spectrum. As you read *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, you will see what makes this fellowship unique, and you will also come to better understand your position in the body of Christ.



INTRODUCTION

THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

*"No man taketh this honour unto himself,
but he that is called of God ..."*

HEBREWS 5:4

BEFORE YOU LOOK at the distinctives of Calvary Chapel, consider first the vital subject of your own calling and commitment to the ministry dedicated to Jesus Christ.

If there is one characteristic that is absolutely essential for effective ministry, it's that you must first have a sense of calling—the conviction in your heart that God has chosen and called you to serve Him. The Bible tells us to make our calling and election sure. Are you convinced that God has called you into the ministry? This is very important to examine because ministry is not a profession that we might choose. It's a calling of God. How do you know if you are called? The ministry to the called is not an option—it's a necessity. As Paul expressed it, "Woe to me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Jeremiah decided that he wasn't going to speak anymore since it got him into a lot of trouble. He was thrown in jail and had his life threatened. So

he decided, “Hey, I’m through. I’m out of here, man.” And he said, “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20:9). It takes that kind of calling in view of the fact that the ministry is not all glamour. There are extremely difficult times. As Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12). You need to understand that even if God has called you to the ministry, that calling is going to be subject to extreme testing. How certain are you that you have been called by God to serve Him?

When I first felt called to the ministry, I went to school to prepare. I had difficulty in school only because I felt I needed to get out and start the ministry. I thought, *There’s the world out there dying without Jesus Christ, and here I am sitting in a classroom going through the textbook.* I was sure that the world was waiting for me. So when I graduated from school and got my first assignment, you can imagine my shock when I discovered the world wasn’t waiting for me. Then the testing came. It was difficult financially and it was difficult spiritually. I didn’t see the fruit that I had anticipated I would see in the ministry—the immediate kinds of results and excitement.

And then there were tremendous financial pressures which necessitated my taking a secular job in order to support my family and stay in the ministry. I found that I wasn’t supported by the ministry. So for the first seventeen years I worked outside the church in order to support myself. Now, that was really hard because I was convinced I was called. There were times when I even questioned the call. And there were times when I asked God to change the calling. I said, “God, call me to be a businessman. I seem to do well and find ease in the business world. I find it easy to make money. And Lord, I can be a

good Christian businessman. I could support the church and support someone in the ministry.” But God would not allow me to escape His call, even though there were times I endeavored to do so. The vision of serving the Lord kept burning in my heart. Therefore, it takes a sense of calling and it is important that you need to ask yourself a simple question: Has God really called me into the ministry?

Hand in hand with a sense of calling comes the basic requirement of commitment. One of the most vital qualities a pastor can have is a faithful devotion to the lordship of Jesus Christ. I am what I am not by my own ambitions, not by my own desires, not by my own will—I am what I am by His will. I’ve committed my life to Him. And if I am committed to the Lord, I will also be committed to His Word and His ministry to serve others.

To have the right attitude in your service, remember the words of Jesus.

The Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all (Mark 10:42-44).

It is essential to recognize that the ministry is not a place of being served—people waiting on you, honoring you, and respecting you because you’re the minister. It’s actually a place of serving people, even if that means going out of your way to do it.

A while back I attended a pastors’ conference and was amazed at what I observed. The pastors would take their coffee cups and sodas into the room where we had our meetings. Now, I had no problem with that, but when we were dismissed they just left their soda cans and coffee cups on the floor. I found myself going around picking up

the coffee cups and soda cans and cleaning the auditorium. I know what happens when someone comes and kicks over a coffee cup on the carpet. I didn't want to leave a bad witness of our Calvary Chapel ministers at that camp facility. Many people see the ministry as an opportunity to be served rather than to serve others. To think, *Well, someone should pick up after me because I am the minister* is not only a contradiction in terms, it's also an unbiblical attitude.

There was a time when I used to leave my clothes around the house. Finally my wife said, "Look, I didn't agree to be your slave. Hang them up yourself. Why should I have to hang up your clothes?" Well, I thought about it and she was right. I shouldn't expect her to hang up my clothes. That was an important lesson for me. I haven't been called to reign—I have been called to serve.

The night of Jesus' final supper with His disciples before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, He took a towel and girded Himself with it. Then He went around and washed the disciples' feet. Afterward, He asked them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:12-14). As Peter said, "For even hereunto you were called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). The word "ministry" actually means "service." We have been called to be servants. We are to be servants, first of our Lord, but also of His children.

It's my personal opinion that people who smoke have one of the dirtiest habits in the world. They always smell and leave a smell wherever they go. It's so easy to detect someone who smokes. All you have to do is walk by and you can smell it on their clothes. If you go into a house where people smoke and take a whiff of the drapery, it will knock you out. It's just a dirty habit. But worse than that, they

throw down their cigarette butts anywhere. Then they usually take their foot and squash the cigarette butt to put out the glow, leaving a mess on the sidewalk. When people come to church, many times they will come up smoking and as they get ready to go into the church, they just throw down the cigarette and drag their foot across it. Who is supposed to pick up that cigarette butt?

As I was growing up, I was taught by my mother never to touch a cigarette. I was so averse to cigarettes that even to the present day I can't touch one without somehow feeling defiled. Every time I reach down to pick up a cigarette butt, the minute I touch it, there's something from my early childhood that just revolts. I hate it! As I walk around the church grounds and see cigarette butts, I don't like how they look on the ground, so I pick them up. But I found that as I was picking them up I was complaining against whoever dropped them there. I would think, *Dirty, stinking inconsiderate, careless, thoughtless people.*

Then the Lord spoke to my heart. He simply said, "Who are you serving?" I said, "I am serving You, Lord." And He replied, "Then quit your griping." So don't serve with a bitter heart. Don't serve with resentment. If I'm picking up cigarette butts and thinking of dirty people, then I resent doing it. But if I think, *Well, Lord, I'll keep Your grounds clean*, then I find that I can pick them up and dispose of them without having that inner disgust because I'm doing it for Jesus—*Not for anyone else's approval, but just for You, Lord.* As the Scriptures tell us: "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

This is the most important attitude to have in the ministry. We need to serve as unto the Lord because we're going to find people who are obnoxious. We're going to find people unthankful. We're going to find that they're demanding, and that many times they're quite miserable to be around. So if you think, *I've got to serve them*, it will

get to you. Yet if you think, *I'm serving the Lord*, then you'll be able to handle it. Whatever our service, we must do it as unto the Lord, knowing that from the Lord, you will receive your reward.

Don't look for the applause of men or for people to say, "Oh, thank you. Oh, you mean so much to me." Oftentimes it won't come. I've done and done for people, and then they kick me in the teeth because I wouldn't do more. You need to keep the mental attitude of doing everything as unto the Lord, knowing that of the Lord you will receive your reward. You've got to keep that in mind. I'm a servant of Jesus Christ. He's my Master. He's the One who will reward me for my service. I need to keep that perspective and keep the right attitude in my heart as I'm serving people. I am doing it for Him.

Not only must we maintain a commitment to Jesus by serving His people, we must also be committed to the Word of God. I believe that anyone who doesn't believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God has no business being in ministry. Sadly, that would probably eliminate fifty percent of the ministers in the United States today. Why teach from a book that you don't believe? And if you do believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and it's your duty to preach it, then by all means, know it. Be committed to it.

As Paul said to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that isn't ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). You can learn how to study the Bible, but the process is never-ending. To the present day, I continue to commit myself to studying the Word of God so as to show myself approved unto God.



CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

"Upon this rock I will build My church ..."

MATTHEW 16:18

CALVARY CHAPEL LOOKS to the book of Acts as the model for the church. We believe that church history, for the most part, has been a sad and tragic story of failure. Many horrible things have been done in the name of Jesus Christ under the banner of the church.

When I went to college I had a very difficult time when the professors found out I was a Christian. They would bring up issues of church history that I was all too familiar with. My only response was, "Look, don't judge Christianity by the imperfect examples that we have seen in history. Judge it by Jesus Christ. Let's go back to what He said and what He taught. He taught, 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.' Do you have a problem with that? He taught that we should love one another. Do you have a problem with that? He taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Do you have a problem with that?" When you talk about the basic teachings of Jesus, even

skeptics have to confess that they don't have a problem. What they have a problem with is people who have claimed to be Christians and the things they have done in the name of Christ.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus was addressing the problems of the seven churches of Asia. Even at this early date, Jesus was calling these churches to repent. He pointed out the flaws that existed, the false doctrines that had crept in, and the practices that were already sowing seeds of decay within the church. The church had failed, for the most part, by the end of the first century. Gnosticism and Aryanism had arisen. The development of a priesthood and the establishment of church organization started early on in the history of the church. Here in the beginning of Revelation, Jesus expressed His displeasure with all these things in His letters to the churches.

This was less than sixty years after the church was first founded. It didn't take long to become so corrupt and lukewarm that the Lord was ready to spew it out of His mouth. It was nauseating to Him. As I look at church history, I don't think that things have improved. The church has only deteriorated even further. The issues the Lord spoke about to the seven churches are things that He could very well say to the church today.

So you can't look at church history to find the model for the church, just like you can't look at the history of mankind and find God's divine intention for man. Man is fallen and so you don't see the divine ideal. The same is true of the church. You don't see the divine ideal for the church by looking at church history.

The divine ideal is found in the book of Acts. This was a church that was dynamic. It was a church led by the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It was a church that brought the gospel to the world. Paul wrote to the Colossians some thirty years after Pentecost,

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and brings forth fruit, as it does also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:5-6).

The first believers experienced a church effective in bringing the gospel to the world.

Looking at the book of Acts, I believe we see the church as God intended it to be. The model that we find in the book of Acts is a church filled with the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It was a church where the Holy Spirit was the One directing its operation and ministry.

How dependent was the early church on the Holy Spirit? We find the Holy Spirit saying, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3). Paul uses such phrases as, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" (Acts 15:28) and "They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them" (Acts 16:7). These men were led by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, and sought the direction of the Holy Spirit.

In the fourth chapter of Acts when they were faced with heavy persecution, they prayed and sought the help and guidance of God. It was then that the Holy Spirit came upon them afresh, and they went forth speaking the Word with boldness.

We see that there were four basic functions of the early church.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

These four foundations must be instituted when developing a fellowship of believers: (1) continue steadfastly in the Word of God, teaching the apostles' doctrine, (2) fellowship in the body of Christ, (3) participate in the breaking of bread, and (4) be people of prayer. If we lead the people this way, we will see God meet every need.

The Lord certainly took care of everything for the church in Acts. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Never forget that it's not your job to add to the church. That's His job. Your job is to feed the flock, tend to the flock, love the flock, and see to it that they're cared for. This is especially true for a smaller flock. The Lord said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: you've been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21). The Lord's not going to make you a ruler over many until you've been faithful with a few. Don't constantly be thinking, *Oh, but I wish we had a thousand here* or *I wish we had five thousand here*. Minister to those eight or ten people that you do have. Be faithful in ministering to them. Be faithful in nourishing them and the Lord will add daily, as He sees fit, those that should be saved. The size of the church is not your concern, nor should it ever be.

If you look at most church programs today, the chief goal is to add to the church. There are all these growth programs and seminars that try to show you how to add to your church. Well, it's very easy. You don't have to pay \$175 for a seminar to find out how to grow a church. Just get the people into the Word. Get the people into prayer. Get them into fellowship and the breaking of bread, and you'll find that the Lord will add to the church daily those that should be saved.

One of the wisest things I ever did when I was still involved in a denomination was to stop counting the number of people. The church always had this chart on the wall that showed Sunday school attend-

ance today, last Sunday, and a year ago. There was a constant emphasis on numbers. People were always being reminded of attendance statistics. "Where are we in relationship to last Sunday?" "Where are we in relationship to a year ago?" "Where is everybody today?" "Why is it that we're down?" It became a distraction. The trap of counting heads is a terrible snare to fall into. Don't do it! Just look at those that are there and realize, *These are the ones the Lord has brought for me to minister to today*. Give them your best and minister to them from your heart. Minister to them diligently. As you're faithful and as you prove yourself a faithful steward, the Lord will bring you more people to watch over, to care for, and minister. So be faithful to those God has placed under your tutelage.

In the book of Acts, we see that some problems arose over a benevolence program in the church. The widows following the Greek culture felt they were being discriminated against, and that special favor was given to the widows who were more traditionally Jewish. So they came to the apostles with their grievances. The apostles said,

It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4 NKJV).

The Word of God was the top priority in the ministry of the early church, along with prayer. They gave themselves to the teaching of God's Word, to fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). When the church is what God intends it to be, when the church is doing what God wants it to do, then the Lord will do what He wants to do for the church. And He will add daily to the church those that should be saved.

The kind of men God used in the church in Acts were men who were totally surrendered to Jesus Christ, not seeking their own glory but only seeking to bring glory unto Jesus. When the crowd assembled upon Solomon's porch, after the healing of the lame man, Peter said, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why do you look so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus" (Acts 3:12-13).

Even Peter, after a great miracle, wouldn't take the glory or the credit. He pointed them to Jesus, bringing glory to the Lord through the miracle that was wrought.

Giving glory to God was the purpose in the early church. The men God used were men who weren't seeking their own glory. This is something that is heavy on my own heart as we look at how men today are striving to be successful, to create a name, to bring glory unto themselves. They're always trying to position themselves so that they're in the limelight, so that the camera catches them. But Jesus insisted, the way up is down. "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

Live for the kingdom of God. Seek to bring glory to Jesus Christ and the Lord will use you. It is my prayer, my constant and daily prayer, that God would keep me usable. Paul desired the same thing. He wrote to the Corinthians, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Success is a dangerous thing. If God begins to bring success to your ministry, you're in much greater danger than if you're just struggling and trying to barely make it in some little insignificant, faraway place

with a fellowship of ten people. It's easy to stay on your knees in those kinds of circumstances. There isn't much opportunity for you to be glorified. But when success comes, that's when the real danger arrives in the ministry. As people begin to look to you, it's so easy to slip into taking the credit or receiving the applause. That's the shortest path to the end of the anointing of God's Spirit.

The Bible says, "For promotion comes neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He puts down one, and sets up another" (Psalm 75:6-7). Promotion seems to be the name of the game today. Many pastors spend all of their time and energy trying to promote a church, or trying to promote themselves. But promotion—true promotion—comes from the Lord. So be careful.

The book of Acts gives us the model for the church. It's a church that is led by the Spirit, teaches the Word, and develops oneness or fellowship (*koinonia*). It's a church that breaks bread together and prays together. The rest is His work—He will add to the church daily those that should be saved.



CHAPTER TWO

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

*“And hath put all things under His feet,
and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church.”*

EPHESIANS 1:22

WE RECOGNIZE THAT the New Testament doesn't give a clear, definitive statement of God's preference for church government. In Scripture, we find three basic forms of church government. Two of them are in the New Testament, and the other one developed through church history. The first form of church government was the rule by bishops, or overseers. The Greek word is *episkopos*. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul wrote, “This is a true saying, If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.”

Timothy gives us the qualifications for an *episkopos*.

A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy for money; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all reverence; (For if a man doesn't

know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the Devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil (1 Timothy 3:2-7).

The other form of church government was leadership by a group of elders called the *presbyteros*.

And when they had ordained them elders (*presbyteros*) in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14:23).

Clearly the New Testament teaches the establishing of bishops, *episkopos*, and the appointing of elders, *presbyteros*. These two forms of government, by their very nature, seem to clash. Is the church to be led by the bishop or by the board of elders? These divisions are so pronounced that today we have two denominations representing both sides of the issue. The Episcopal Church follows the *episkopos* and is ruled by a bishop. Also the Presbyterian Church, following the *presbyteros*, is ruled by a board of elders. Both do not show a clear, definitive teaching about the correct form of church government. Both sides present a valid case for their point of view.

Over time, a third form of church government has arisen, known as congregational rule. I don't believe that congregational rule is an option because the Bible doesn't have an example where the congregation was right. On the contrary, the congregation was always saying, "We want a king to rule over us like the other nations," making demands that were not after the will of God. I can't find a scriptural example of effective congregational rule.

However, we do read of congregations attempting to rule. In Exodus 16:2 we read, "And the whole congregation of the children of

Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness." And Numbers 14:1-3 reads, "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Only if God had let us die in the land of Egypt or only die in this wilderness! So why has the LORD brought us unto this land ... Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"

Moses responds to God in Numbers 14:27, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmurs against me?" So woe to the man who pastors a congregational church. Like Moses, the pastor will only find murmuring and uprisings.

These are the three basic forms of church government that we see today: the *Episkopos*, the *Presbyteros*, and the more recent Congregationalists.

We find in Scripture a form of government that God established and modeled in the early history of Israel. In its inception, the nation of Israel was a theocracy—people who were ruled by God. The Israelites' demise came when they tired of God's rule and demanded to have a monarchy instead. They said, "We want a king to rule over us. We want to be like the other nations."

Here's an example of theocracy. Under God there was a man named Moses who went to Him for guidance and direction. Moses was an earthly leader the people recognized as receiving from God guidance, direction, laws, and rules for the nation. Moses was their link to God. They said, "Look, we're afraid to approach God. He's awesome. We've seen the fire and heard the thunder. You talk to Him and then tell us what He says and we'll obey it." So they recognized that Moses was being directed by God. He would go up the mountain and talk to God and, in turn, come down and share it with the people.

For Moses, the personal demands were staggering. The line of people with needs would stretch to the horizon every day. They would come to Moses to judge on every little issue that had arisen. "They borrowed my hoe, and they never returned it." Now this went on all day long, every day until Jethro, his father-in-law, said, "Hey, son, this is going to kill you. You can't take care of the things that need to be done because of this long line of people waiting for your judgment." So the Lord told Moses to take seventy elders of Israel and gather them into the tent of congregation. God took the Spirit that He had put upon Moses and placed it upon the elders so the people could come to them and they could give the rulings and judgments. If issues arose that were too difficult for them, then they went to Moses, who then asked God for clarification on the issue (Exodus 18:13-26).

For additional support, Aaron and the priesthood under Moses oversaw the spiritual needs of the nation, such as the preparation and offering of sacrifices. The congregation of Israel was under the elders and Aaron. This is the form of government that God established for the nation of Israel.

In the church today we see this structure in a modified form. We see that Jesus Christ is the Head over the body of the church. It's His church. He's the One in charge. Pastors need to be like Moses, in touch with Jesus and receiving His direction and guidance. Pastors need to be leading the church in such a way that the people know the Lord is in control. Then when issues come up, the pastor can say, "Well, let me pray about it. Let me seek the wisdom of the Lord and look for the Lord's guidance." Also, like Moses, within the church we have a board of elders who pray with us and support us in seeking the Lord's leading for the church.

As a pastor, you want elders who are men of prayer, and who recognize that God has anointed you and ordained you as the pastor of the

church. Paul warned Timothy not to lay hands on any man suddenly (1 Timothy 5:22). Really get to know the men well before giving them positions of authority. It's like marriage, you really don't know your wife until you have been married to her for a while. Many times there are a lot of surprises. It's also important to remember that problems usually arise when you start to have some success and the church begins to grow and becomes powerful. Unfortunately, there are many people who have a desire for power. When they see there's money in the bank, they will make their move for position and control.

It's necessary to have godly men who recognize that God has called and ordained the pastor of the church. Men who will work with and support those things that God is directing the pastor to implement within the church. A good board is one of the greatest assets you can have in your ministry. I thank God that Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa has been blessed with great men of God serving on the board. We usually look at the Saturday night prayer meetings or look at the all-night prayer watch for men to serve on the board. We want men of prayer. We want men who are seeking God and the will of God.

Real elders aren't a bunch of yes men, but they are men yielded to the Holy Spirit. They're a real buffer and protection for the pastor. Their job is to interface with the congregation and deal with any problems that the people bring to them. Many times they will simply reply, "Well, this is the church policy, and this is why we do things in this way." And it doesn't go any further. Sometimes at the board meeting they will bring a list of questions and ask me how I feel. On occasion I'll answer, "Well, I don't have any real feelings. Let's seek the Lord." In many instances I will just let them work out the issues.

When I was a very young pastor in Tucson, Arizona (the second church I pastored), we had an annual Fourth of July picnic at Mount Lemon. Now, Tucson on the Fourth of July is 110 degrees in the valley, so we

would go to Mount Lemon where the temperatures were cooler and it had a great area for picnics. They had restrooms, running water, tables and playgrounds. It was a wonderful place for the church to go and have our Fourth of July picnic. And it was a good time for fellowship. Once before the Fourth of July, one of our members said, "I have an acre of ground up on Mount Lemon. And rather than mixing with the worldly crowd in the state park, I think it would be great if the church would come up and have the picnic on my acre of ground." We said, "Do you have any water?" And he said, "No." "Do you have any restrooms?" "No, just an acre of ground." It was also another five miles up the road from the state park to his acre. He countered with, "But it would be great to have a day of fasting and prayer." Now how can anyone, as a pastor, speak against fasting and prayer without appearing really unspiritual before the people?

So a group of people in the church discussed it and agreed it would be wonderful to have a day of fasting and prayer on the acre of ground. It would be just us, and we'd have a glorious time.

However, there was another group in the church who said, "We're not taking our kids to a place that doesn't have water. And who is going to watch the kids while we're fasting and praying? There are no restrooms. If you go up there we aren't going." And the spiritual group replied, "Well, if you go to the state park, we're not going." As a result, a very sharp division ensued within the congregation.

Our Fourth of July picnic had been such a glorious delight year after year, but now it was going to be scuttled because of this division. Both sides came to me and said, "Chuck, where are we going to have our picnic?" So with wisdom from the Lord beyond my years, I said, "We will let the board decide." We had a board meeting and they unanimously decided to go to the state park. I went back to the people and said, "The board has decided to have our picnic at

the state park." I was then able to go to the spiritual ones who wanted to fast and pray and say, "That's a great idea. It would be wonderful to spend a day fasting and praying. Maybe we can go some other time, just us, and fast and pray. But as far as the picnic goes they felt it best to go to the state park."

Because the board had made the decision, I was free to minister to both sides. The board became the buffer. And it's great to have a buffer like that because then people don't polarize against you saying, "It was the pastor who decided, and I don't agree with his decision."

I believe God's model is that the pastor is ruled over by the Lord and recognized by the congregation as God's anointed instrument to lead the church, with the board guiding and directing. Complementing this is the role of the assisting pastors. They are there to minister to the spiritual needs of the people on a daily basis. With these components in place, there is an effective form of church government.

When the church is a presbyterian kind of government, the board is ruling over the church and hires the pastor. The board can fire the pastor in the same fashion. With that kind of rule the pastor becomes a hireling and it can be very detrimental to the congregation.

The same is true with congregational rule. A pastor is hired by the congregation rather than ordained by the Lord who is the Head of the body. He's not appointed by Jesus Christ, the Head of the body, but instead he's elected or selected by the board or by the congregation. Here again, the pastor becomes a hireling. I don't believe that anyone can do his best work as a hireling.

It is my belief that everyone should be a deacon. The ministry of helps was the essence of the deacon's function. They were there to look after the facilities, the needs of the congregation, and to help the sick. One of the worst things to do is to start giving titles to people in the

church, especially a title that distinguishes one above another. That's a dangerous thing.

Concerning the spiritual qualifications for church leadership, Jude said in his benediction, "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24). I am only blameless as I am in Christ Jesus. Still, it's true that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. If anybody realized his disqualification for the ministry, it was Paul the apostle who said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). He was saying, "I'm less than the least of all the saints. I'm not really worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God." He refers to himself elsewhere saying, "This grace is given to the chiefest of sinners." Paul realized that his position was given only by God's grace. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 he said, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He truly recognized that in Christ he was blameless. So the key qualification for a pastor or leader in the church is to be "in Christ Jesus" and, in this state, blameless.

I believe that if a man is not abiding in Christ, but is walking in the flesh, he is disqualified from the position of an *episkopos*. Walking in the flesh describes a practiced lifestyle. Satan is out to destroy anyone with an effective ministry and I believe that all of us are capable of stumbling. As Jesus said to Peter, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen the brethren" (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter responded, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet I will never be offended" (Matthew 26:33). He was saying, "Lord, though they all may forsake You, I would never do that. Lord, I would

die for You!" That self-confidence had to be dealt with before he could realize his total dependency upon the Holy Spirit. It was something that had to be dealt with in his life. And I think it's something that has to be dealt with in all of our lives. When we have areas of self-confidence, the Lord gradually shows us that, in and of ourselves, we can do nothing. As Paul said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18). So whenever we think we are the exceptions to the rule, the Lord allows us to stumble, to teach us our total reliance upon Him.

When we step into the flesh and decide that we're going to live after the flesh, we disqualify ourselves from any position of service. But if we take the word "blameless" in a very literal sense, then all of us might as well pack up and go get a job selling cars. I believe that repentance is the key—true repentance—and once there's true repentance, then there is forgiveness, and restoration can begin. But there has to be true repentance, a real turning away from sin.

I've observed that those churches that follow the rule of the eldership so often are not really looking for a pastor as much as they're looking for a hireling. Their idea of a pastor is: "Someone who is going to come in and dance to our beat. We'll pull the strings and as long as you respond and react, you're a fair-haired employee. But if you dare step out on your own, then it's a different story."

Before we came to Calvary Chapel, I had started an independent church in Corona that was an outgrowth of a home Bible study. Some of the men involved in the home Bible study decided to form a corporation which they called Corona Christian Association. They set up the corporation so that people could tithe into it, primarily to put me on the radio in Corona. These men who set up the corporation were the corporate officers, and they started a radio broadcast that immediately brought in a multitude of people.

When these men invited me to start a church in Corona, I wanted to leave the denomination I was involved in and become independent. We began the Corona Christian Center and it was blessed of God. I was still living in Newport Beach and driving there on Sundays. We'd spend the day there and then drive home on Sunday night. One Sunday afternoon when my family was with me at the American Legion Hall that we rented, I decided to put the chairs in a circle rather than in rows. I removed the pulpit and just set up a big circle of chairs. As the people came in that night, we all sat in a circle like in the home Bible studies. Instead of singing three hymns out of the hymnal, accompanied by the organ and the piano, we just sang. I led them *a cappella* in worship choruses. After that we had a directed prayer time, bringing up issues and the people in the circle would pray. Then just sitting there in the chair, I taught informally.

I felt led by the Spirit and it was very dynamic. I mean, it was exciting! There were fellows that night who spoke out in prayer who had never prayed publicly before. So many were really touched and moved. However, the board members got together afterward for a special meeting. They called me the next morning and wanted to know just what I thought I was doing, and they let me know they didn't want me to do that again. At the time I thought, *This might be my life's ministry. But it won't be under these kinds of restrictions. I must be open to be led by the Spirit.*

So when we came to Calvary Chapel and established the bylaws, we didn't create a presbyterian form of government. It was more of an *episkopos* form of government for Calvary Chapel. We believe that God's model is that the pastor is ruled by the Lord and aided by the elders to discover the mind and will of Jesus Christ for His church. This in turn is implemented by the assistant pastors.



CHAPTER THREE

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

ACTS 1:8

ANOTHER CALVARY CHAPEL distinctive is the position concerning the Holy Spirit empowering the life of a believer that is distinct and separate from the indwelling of the Spirit that takes place at conversion. Paul asked the Ephesians if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, or since they believed. No matter which translation you choose, the Scriptures clearly teach that there is an experience with the Holy Spirit that is separate and distinct from that of salvation.

When Philip went to Samaria preaching Christ to them, many believed and were baptized. When the church in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the gospel, Acts 8:15-16 says they sent Peter and John, "Who, when they had come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (NKJV). Here we see an experience of the Holy Spirit that was separate and distinct from conversion.

In the second chapter of Acts the people said, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38). And then we see in Acts 9 that Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, but Ananias came to him and laid hands on him that he might receive his sight and receive the Holy Spirit.

Calvary Chapel believes there is an empowering experience with the Holy Spirit that is separate and distinct from conversion. Calvary Chapel acknowledges a three-fold relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believer that is represented by three Greek prepositions—*para*, *en*, and *epi*.

And I [Jesus] will pray to the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him: but you know Him; for He dwells with you, and shall be in you (John 14:16-17).

“With you” speaks of the *para* relationship, the coming alongside. The *en* in the phrase “in you” is equivalent to our English preposition “in” as in “He is going to dwell in you.”

The Holy Spirit dwells with a person prior to conversion. He is the One who convicts him of his sin, convincing him that Jesus Christ is the only answer. The Holy Spirit constantly testifies of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Calvary Chapel also believes that the moment a person receives the witness of the Holy Spirit, Jesus takes away his sin. When anyone invites Jesus to come into his heart, to take over the rule and control of his life, we believe that the Holy Spirit then comes into that person’s life. He is with each one of us to bring us to Christ, and when we come to Christ, He begins then to dwell in us.

Paul said, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He also told the Ephesians, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Thus, Calvary Chapel believes that every born-again child of God has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. He is under the injunction of the Scriptures to yield his body to the control of the Holy Spirit and to be filled constantly with the Holy Spirit.

Calvary Chapel also believes the Holy Spirit provides the power in the life of the believer to give him victory over sin and over the flesh. We are to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. He who walks after the Spirit will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The Holy Spirit gives power over the flesh life, over our fallen nature. He is the power in our lives to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). So we see the dynamic power of the Spirit in us which comes when we accept Jesus. He begins that work in us, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ.

There is a third relationship that is separate and distinct from the first two. In Acts 1:8 we see this promise, “But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” This relationship is when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. The word is *epi* in the Greek, which means “upon” or “over.” I prefer the translation “overflow” because I believe that this experience allows the Holy Spirit to flow forth out of our lives. Our lives then are not just a vessel containing the Spirit, but they become channels by which the Spirit flows forth to touch the world around us. I also believe this is the objective work of the Spirit. The first work is subjective, when the changes and the

transformations take place within me. This “coming upon” experience provides objective evidence of the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, allowing me to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ. That is God’s ideal and plan—that my life be the instrument through which He can reach the world around me as the Spirit flows forth out of my life.

In the New Testament we find that Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). I believe that when Jesus breathed on them and said this, they received the Holy Spirit. Some people claim that was just a symbolic action. Show me the Scripture where we are told that this was just symbolic. Why didn’t John say, “Well, He did a symbolic thing here”? There isn’t the scriptural support to say this was only symbolic. I believe at that moment the disciples were born again by the Spirit of God.

Then Jesus told His disciples they were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father which He had been talking to them about. Acts 1:5 says, “For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” Jesus also said, “But you shall receive power (*dunamis*), after that the Holy Spirit is come upon (*epi*) you” (Acts 1:8). They needed that overflowing of the Spirit to effectively serve the Lord.

Calvary Chapel believes this is the experience Jesus referred to when, on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He stood and cried to the multitude, “If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” And John, giving the commentary, wrote, “But this He spoke of the Spirit, to those believing on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39). This “coming upon” has been referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the overflow of the Spirit—like a torrent of living water flowing out of the life of the believer.

So it’s one thing to be filled with the Spirit—it’s quite another to have the Spirit flowing out. The inlet of the Spirit is powerful and dynamic, but that flowing forth of the Spirit from my life is necessary to affect and touch others.

Jesus made three promises to us about the Spirit—He is with you, He shall be in you, and He will give you power when He comes over you, or upon you. The Holy Spirit is with us prior to conversion. He reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. It’s the Holy Spirit who brings conviction of sin to your heart, drawing you and pointing you to Jesus—the only answer to your sin. Having drawn you to Christ, when you open the door, He comes into your life and begins to indwell you. The power of the Holy Spirit indwelling you conforms your character into the image of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit helps you to live the Christian life and conforms you into His image. He does for you what you can’t do for yourself.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” He also said, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Through God’s work of salvation my body has become the temple of the Spirit. He’s dwelling in me. He has the power to change me in order to conform me into the image of Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s desire is that He flows forth out of my life. It’s one thing to pour water into a cup, but it’s another thing to pour it out of the cup. It’s one thing to have the Holy Spirit poured *into* my life—it’s another thing to allow the Holy Spirit to pour *out* of my life. That’s the necessary dynamic for the ministry. Even the disciples were not

permitted to engage in the ministry until they had received this dynamic of the Spirit. “Being assembled together with them, He commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which He said, you have heard of Me” (Acts 1:4). The “promise of the Father” is this dynamic of the Holy Spirit. It’s the *epi* experience, the coming upon.

This experience is usually separate from salvation, but it can be concurrent with salvation, as was the case in the house of Cornelius. As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon them, *epi*, and they began to speak in tongues. So the apostles decided that if God would baptize them with the Spirit, the apostles should also allow them to be baptized with water (Acts 10).

Calvary Chapel believes that there is an experience with the Holy Spirit that is distinct from conversion and indwelling. Some call it baptism. Some call it being filled with the Spirit. Whatever you choose to call it, it means being overflowed with the Spirit. You can fill a cup, but if you keep pouring, it’s going to overflow. This is distinct from just being filled. This is overflowing with the Spirit. Some call it the gift of the Spirit. Some call it the empowering of the Spirit. We could debate over theological terms, but the experience is described as a gushing forth of torrents of living water from our innermost being. So whatever name you call it isn’t important. The main question we must ask concerning this necessary empowering experience for the ministry is simple: DO YOU HAVE IT?



CHAPTER FOUR

BUILDING THE CHURCH GOD’S WAY

*“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,
saith the LORD of hosts.”*

ZECHARIAH 4:6

A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTIC of Calvary Chapel is a relaxed casual style. There isn’t a lot of spiritual hype. The pastor doesn’t try to motivate people carnally nor is apt to shout at the congregation. This stems from the belief that if the Lord doesn’t build the house, they labor in vain who build it. A lot of hype and pressure aren’t really going to do the job. We simply trust in the work of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus Christ is building His church as He said He would.

If I have complete confidence that it’s His church—He’s going to build it—then all I have to do is be faithful. I simply need to watch His work, and then the pressure isn’t on me. I don’t get all hyped or pressured because the work of God isn’t my responsibility. It’s not my church. It’s His church. I believe that it’s very important to remember this, because if you try to carry the load and bear the burden, you’ll find it’s too great for you. You’ll find yourself under pressure to create

schemes and hypes, and then you begin to push and manipulate people. That isn't the Calvary Chapel style.

Back in 1969, we purchased an acre-and-a-half of land on the corner of Sunflower and Greenville. There was an old country school there, which we dismantled and used the materials to build our little chapel. Because we used the existing materials, we were able to build the chapel for \$40,000, including the pews. But just after two years, the chapel was totally inadequate. We had triple services on Sunday, setting up 500 chairs in the patio, and people were parking all the way past the *Los Angeles Times* building on Fairview, more than a quarter mile away. So we knew we had to do something.

At that time, the parcel of property Calvary Chapel occupies today came up for sale. One of the fellows in the church was a realtor, and he had put together a group that bought this eleven-acre property, planning to turn it for a profit. They were speculating on it and had several deals pending, but Santa Ana City Hall rejected them. They had a balloon payment of \$350,000 coming due on the property and weren't in a position to pay it. They had actually stopped making the monthly interest payments to the lady who owned the property, and finally lost it.

The realtor who was involved in our fellowship came to me and suggested that the church obtain the property. My response was, "Well, what in the world would we ever do with eleven acres?" He suggested that we could always sell off half of it. Then another fellow in the church came to me and said he was certain we could get the land for \$300,000.

"Ridiculous!" I said. "There's no way she'd sell it for that because she just foreclosed on a note for \$350,000. Why would she sell it to us for \$300,000?"

"Well, I happen to know a few things about the lady's situation," he said. "She had been paying the taxes with the interest payments that these guys were giving her. But because they haven't made any payments, she really doesn't have the money to pay the taxes. She's close to eighty, she needs the cash, and I think that if we made a \$300,000 cash offer, she would take it."

I said, "Great, but where would we get \$300,000 cash?"

"If we can buy it for \$300,000 then you can borrow half that amount from the savings and loan. They will loan fifty percent on the property. We have \$110,000 in the bank, and I'll loan the \$90,000 interest-free for a year."

"Well, she'll never take it."

Then he asked, "Will you give me the permission to offer it to her in the name of the church?"

"Sure," I responded. A short time later he called me up and said, "Well, Chuck, she's accepted." My first thought was, *Well, great! But what do I do now?*

At that time Fairview Street had just been completed through to Sunflower. I used to drive up to the corner of Fairview and Sunflower on my way from the other chapel. As I waited for the green arrow to turn left, I'd look over at this huge field, and begin to panic.

I thought, *You know, God has been good to us. We've paid off all of the debts, and we don't owe anything. We have \$60,000 in the bank, we're running a surplus, and things are going so well. What am I doing to this flock of people, putting them into debt along with the potential of having to build on this? What am I doing? Where is my head?*

I would go into a cold sweat trying to figure the thing out. Then the Lord would speak to my heart and say, “Chuck, whose church is it?”

I’d answer, “Well, it’s Your church.”

Then God would reply, “Well, then, why are you worrying about bankruptcy?”

I thought, *Why am I? I’m not the one going bankrupt. The Lord will be the One going bankrupt, so why should I worry?*

Then God would say, “Who created the problem?”

And I’d answer, “You did. You’re the One who has brought all the people. You created this problem of needing more space.” So God assured me that it was His church and His problem. He created the situation. Then I would find relief—until the next time I pulled up to the corner and looked at the property. I’m sort of hardheaded, so this was a process that continued for a period of time.

Realizing our fellowship was His church relieved me from the burden. I didn’t have to carry the load myself, and I could stay relaxed. It was His church so He would take care of it. Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). He didn’t say, “Upon this rock you will build My church.” We need to realize that it’s His church and He’s the One who said He would build it. When Jesus asked Peter the question, “Do you love Me?” Peter answered, “Yea, Lord; You know I love You.” Jesus then didn’t say, “Go out and build My church.” He said, “Feed My sheep”—that is, “Tend to them and take care of them” (John 21:16).

It’s His job to add to the church, His job to build the church. My job is just to love the sheep, take care of them, watch over them, feed them, tend them, and trust the Lord to build the church and add those that should be saved.

We have discovered that whenever you strive to gain, you must then strive to maintain what you’ve gained. If you really pushed and pressured to gain it, you have the pressure to keep it going. Maintenance is tough if it’s a man-made, man-built program.

A long time ago, I was in a denomination and was under pressure to build the church. I was using every kind of device suggested and offered. There were church growth programs and various kinds of contests. I tried them all in an effort to build the church. I discovered firsthand that when you strive to gain, then you must strive to maintain. If it’s the Lord’s work, if He has done it and He has added, then you don’t have to strive to keep it going. It’s that striving to maintain that creates ministerial burnout or will run you into the ground or will lead you into all kinds of aberrant practices. Because you’ve striven to gain this crowd, you have now got a crowd you must strive to hold, and that can be really tough.

Throughout the country many large churches have resulted from tremendous growth programs. But you have to keep that program going. You have to keep it oiled and greased and moving, or the church begins to fall apart. And all of the striving and all of the hype it takes to maintain the program will absolutely kill you. There are a lot of super churches today, but there are also a lot of tired leaders because they are striving to maintain what they’ve built.

Striving to gain doesn’t just mean buying into the latest church growth program to come down the line. It can also happen in a hyped-up spiritual environment, where church growth is created by spiritual and emotional excitement and the hyping of the gifts of the Spirit. Again, you’ve got a very difficult kind of situation, because if you use this spiritual hype to attract and draw a crowd, you’ve started down a one-way street that only gets more difficult as you go. You see, if you appeal to people through the supernatural and the spectacular, and if

that's your big forte, you have to continue to get other, more exotic spiritual experiences to hold the crowd that you have drawn through these kinds of phenomena.

There is something about our human nature that, no matter how appealing or exotic an experience might be, we soon tire of it and want something else—a new twist, a new angle or a new attraction. It seems like it takes more and more power to maintain the same level of excitement and thrill.

Years ago I had a boating experience that began with a little 12-footer and a Johnson 25hp engine. It was exciting as we learned to ski. Someone had to sit on the end of the hull to keep the nose down to get the skier up, but we learned to ski with it anyway. It was wonderful for the first summer. During the winter we bought a Javelin hull, fiberglassed it and fixed it up. It was a 14-footer with a great hull. But now the little Johnson 25hp wasn't powerful enough for the Javelin hull, so we got a Mercury 55E which was much better. Nobody had to get out on the front of the boat to help the skier. That was great—but by the end of the summer there were boats passing us by, so we traded in the Mercury 55E for a Mercury 75E. But then the 14-foot Javelin hull wasn't quite nice enough for the Mercury 75E. I thought, *Well, outboards are okay, but you really need to go to an inboard motor*, so we got a Chevy 354. When do you stop? Fortunately, I did stop, but there's always something more. It was just a little bit bigger, a little bit nicer.

It's the same with the attraction generated by spiritual hype. You can only hear so many "Thus saith the Lord's" before the impact or rush is gone. So you have to keep doing something new, something different. You'll ultimately get to the place where you're laughing uncontrollably, barking like a dog or roaring like a lion. Look how some churches have gone from one bizarre practice to another and another. It becomes

insatiable. You run out of the legitimate and you begin to revert to the illegitimate. You have to keep fanning that lust for novel, bizarre, and different kinds of experiences that will continue to give the same kind of spiritual rush people have come to desire and long for.

Calvary Chapels are minus the hype. There isn't the carnal pursuit of new programs or spiritual hype to try to appeal to people. We trust in the Word of God and teach it and rely upon it. It's the foundation upon which we are built. It's inexhaustible. There's no burnout with it. The Word of God just keeps going on and on.

For this reason, we have a relaxed, casual style that's reflected in our ministry. It's His church so we don't have to sweat it. Calvary Chapel really isn't into seminars on how to build a church, how to create a user-friendly church, or how to develop a five-year plan. Who knows if we'll even be here five years from now—let's minister for today.

A while back I was asked to speak at a leadership seminar in Phoenix to a group of social strategists who study various social trends and develop plans for the church as we entered the new millennium. Some pretty prominent fellows were on this panel discussing strategies. "How are we going to meet the needs for the future and develop the appropriate church strategies?"

Well, I upset the moderator because I said, "I have this philosophy, 'If it isn't broken, don't fix it.' God continues to bless the teaching of His Word, the church continues to grow, the Lord continues to add daily, and He honors His Word like He said He would. I'm satisfied that as long as God is blessing the Word, I will keep teaching the Word. Why should I change? Why should I try to remodel it when it's still working? If the day should come when it doesn't work anymore, then the Word of God has failed, so why even teach it?"

Of course, the moderator became very upset with that, and the rest of the day we were trading barbs back and forth. Interestingly enough, I've never been asked to speak again at those wonderful conferences.

I find that by the time I get through with the Old Testament, the church is hungry and ready to get into the New Testament. By the time I am finished with the New Testament, it's exciting to get back to Genesis in the Old Testament. It keeps building every time you go through it. You gain and learn so much more. You've been enriched, and so have the people. It never gets old. It never gets stale. It never gets to the place where you have to find some new gimmick, angle or experience. It's just the Word of God—alive and powerful and ministers to the spirit of people.



CHAPTER FIVE

GRACE UPON GRACE

"For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace ..."

HEBREWS 13:9

CALVARY CHAPEL HAS a distinctive position on the subject of God's grace. Without the grace of God, none of us would have a chance. We need the grace of God in our lives. We need it daily. We experience it, and we're saved by it personally. But we also stand in grace. We believe in the love and grace that seeks to restore the fallen.

There are some churches which are severely lacking in the grace of God. Often there's a very harsh, inflexible, and severe form of legalism that doesn't allow room for repentance and restoration. You would be amazed at the flack I've taken because I want to help restore those who are fallen. Whenever I see a talented servant of God fall to the lures of the enemy, I get angry with Satan who seeks to rip off some of our finest servants.

Calvary Chapel has a very strong position on grace. We believe the Bible teaches God is gracious. That's one of His chief characteristics in dealing with man. If He wasn't a God of grace, none of us would be here. We all need the grace and the mercy of God. Whenever I pray, I never ask God for justice—unless I'm praying about somebody else. Whenever I'm praying about myself, it's always, "Grace!" or "Mercy, Lord, mercy! Have mercy on me! Deal in justice with that guy who's wronged me, but Lord, I want mercy."

It's interesting that having received mercy and grace, the Lord emphasizes our need to show mercy and grace. He said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Jesus seems to equate forgiveness with our willingness to forgive. This is evident in what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer. At the end of that model prayer, He emphasizes only one of the petitions—the request we make concerning forgiveness. "But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15).

Jesus taught parables dealing with the necessity of forgiveness. In Matthew 18, we see the master who forgave his servant's sixteen-million-dollar debt. But that same servant went to a fellow servant who owed him only sixteen dollars and had him thrown in debtor's prison. The master then called the first servant and said, "How much did you owe me? And did I not forgive you? How is it I heard that you have put this fellow servant in prison for his debt?" He rebuked him and ordered him to be cast into prison, until he had paid the uttermost farthing (Matthew 18:23-35).

If we've been forgiven so much, surely we should forgive. Having received the grace of God, we should manifest that grace of God to those who have fallen. I need the grace of God daily. I've been saved by grace—not because of my works—so the glory goes to God for

what He has done. I can't boast in what I've done. I've done nothing. It isn't by works of righteousness but by His grace that we are saved.

This is a theme we find throughout the New Testament, and therefore a theme we emphasize. The books of Romans and Galatians become very significant because both set forth righteousness and the grace of God through faith. This is in direct contrast with the self-righteousness that one attains through the works of the law.

Calvary Chapel seeks to restore those who have fallen, as Paul taught to the Galatians, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). I thank the Lord for the grace I've received, and having received God's grace, I seek to extend it to others.

I get angry with Satan when I hear of gifted ministers who have fallen. Those who have great abilities and talents for the Lord seem to be special targets of Satan. I'm just not willing to let Satan have victory. I try to reclaim these men for the kingdom of God so they might use their talents for the Lord.

I love to take old wrecks and make something attractive out of them. I had a 1957 Ford Skyliner. Now, if you had seen it when I first got it, it looked like it was ready for the junkyard. But what fulfillment I had in taking time and working with it, pulling it apart, sanding it, getting the rust out, repainting it, putting it back together, and finally seeing something beautiful and attractive out of what was just a wreck. There's joy and fulfillment in it. I also love to do that with old houses. My daughter buys fixer-uppers, and then says, "Daddy, come over." I love to take these old fixer-uppers, remodel them, and make them attractive, modern, and beautiful. And the same holds true with lives that Satan has really fouled up.

God loves to take, develop, remold, and rebuild lives that are a real wreck. Look at most of the Calvary Chapel ministers. Their lives were a real wreck, yet look at how God has restored. Look at the wealth and the value that have come out of these lives. It's a beautiful work of God to see what the world has cast off as hopeless wrecks transformed into glorious vessels of honor.

Having been forgiven, we need to be forgiving. Having received mercy, we must show mercy. Having received grace, we must be gracious. Showing and extending God's grace is an important part of the Calvary Chapel ministry.

In John 8:2, Jesus had come into the temple and He began to teach. Suddenly, His teaching was interrupted by a commotion. There was hysterical sobbing and crying. "And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act" (John 8:3-4).

The enemies of Christ were constantly putting Jesus' teachings at odds with Moses. They recognized that Moses was the instrument who brought them the law of God. There was no question about Moses' authority. He spoke for God. If Jesus said something that was contrary to the law of Moses, then He couldn't claim to be of God.

We read in Matthew 19:9 they questioned Jesus about whether a man could put away his wife for any cause. Jesus answered, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoever marries her, which is put away, commits adultery." They responded saying that Moses said they could divorce by writing a bill of divorcement. They thought they had trapped Jesus. Yet Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24, and said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate.

Because of the hardness of the people's hearts, Moses gave the precept of writing a bill of divorcement, but in the beginning it was not so."

So here with the woman caught in adultery, they were seeking to pit Jesus against the Mosaic law. "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what do You say? This they said, tempting Him, that they might accuse Him" (John 8:5-6). But Jesus didn't say anything. He just stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground as if He didn't even hear them.

What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground? I really don't know. Maybe He wrote, "Where is the man?" They had said, "We caught *her* in the very act." Well, they couldn't catch her in the act without catching the man too. According to Moses' law they were both to be stoned. So if they were really interested in keeping the Mosaic law, they would have been dragging the guy there too. Maybe the guy was a friend and they let him go. This wasn't really justice.

Jesus' enemies were upset as He wrote on the ground as though He was ignoring them. So they pressed the question. Finally, He stood and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her" (John 8:7). Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. This time I think I know what He wrote. He may have written the names of the men who were standing there ready to condemn, probably starting with the oldest. I think He began to write the sins that the oldest man had been committing, detailing some of his sinful activities. Suddenly, this man excused himself saying he had to go home early. After he took off, Jesus wrote down the name of the next oldest and began to write down a few things he had been doing until that man took off. One by one this continued, from the oldest to the youngest, until finally there was no one left. Jesus then stood up, and looking at the woman said to her, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no man condemned you?" She said, "No man, Lord."

Then Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more” (John 8:10-11).

What a beautiful response of Jesus. “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and sin no more.”

When there’s a serious accident and cars are banged up and people’s bodies are battered, cut, bleeding, and lying there in the street, two types of emergency vehicles arrive on the scene.

The first to arrive is usually the police, and their job is to develop a safety zone to control the traffic. Then they get out their pads and look at the positions of the cars. They measure the skid marks and start interviewing witnesses. Their job is to find out who violated the law. Who’s to blame for this tragedy? Their chief concern is to determine what laws were violated and who is at fault for what happened.

The second type of vehicle contains the paramedics. They couldn’t care less who is to blame. There are people bleeding in the street. Their job is to minister to those bleeding people, check the heartbeat, bandage them, look for broken bones, get them on the stretcher, and lift them into the ambulance. They’re not thinking about whose fault it is. They aren’t there to cast blame. They’re there to help those who are hurting.

Now, there are also two types of ministers that I have observed. First are those that take the attitude of the policeman. They come upon the tragedies, the broken lives, and they get out the code book. They’re going to read you the law. “You have the right to remain silent, but anything you say may be used against you.” They’re on the scene in a very legal way trying to find out who is at fault, who is to blame, and to read you the law.

But then there are those ministers who are more like the paramedics, and who aren’t so concerned with who broke the law, but how they can heal. “How can we help? How can we minister to the broken body, this broken life? How can we put things back together? How can we bring healing?”

The Pharisees in John 8 have the code book out. “Our Law says stone her. What do You say?” But Jesus was interested in ministering to the woman, helping her, putting her life back together, not condemning her—“Neither do I condemn thee.” His desire was to put her back on the road again.

Calvary Chapel seeks to minister to hurting people—to see them restored, back on their feet, functioning again. John tells us that the Law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. If I am to be a minister of Jesus Christ, then I must be ministering grace. As we look at churches and as we look at ministry, we see many who are principally ministers of Moses. They are very harsh and legalistic. The Law has been broken, and they will tell you exactly what the Law says. And yet we find Jesus saying, “Whoever is without sin cast the first stone ... neither do I condemn thee.”

It’s been our joy and privilege to be able to restore many who were condemned by the Law. I do believe that before restoration, there must be true repentance. I believe that the Law was intended as a schoolmaster to bring people to Jesus Christ. Those who have not come and repented need the Law, thus there is a place for the Law. It is holy, righteous, and good, if used lawfully. But I think sometimes we go beyond and want to exact the penalties of the Law after there has been repentance. We aren’t willing to restore. Jesus stood for grace and truth. We should always seek restoration, but let us not forget that repentance is necessary.

It's wonderful to see a life that's been battered and bruised become fruitful again for the kingdom of God. But grace is not without risk. I may make a mistake in forgiving and showing grace to some people. Maybe a person's repentance wasn't genuine. Maybe they still have a hidden agenda. I have shown grace to people who proved later to be involved in sin still, and who, later on, damaged me. I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes in judgment and I've shown grace to those who had not truly repented of their evil.

I have taken chances, brought fellows on staff who had supposedly repented but later on, the same traits were still there. I've erred. And I probably will make mistakes in the future. But I will tell you this, if I'm going to err, I want to err on the side of grace rather than on the side of judgment.

The Lord spoke against the shepherds in Ezekiel 34. They had let the sheep go astray and didn't go out to seek the lost ones. The Lord had some pretty heavy things to say against those shepherds who weren't really concerned in seeking and restoring the lost ones. I believe God will be far more lenient with me and my errors of grace than He will be if I condemned someone whom He has pardoned and forgiven.

Several Scriptures warn us against judgment. "Judge not, lest you be judged" (Matthew 7:1). We set the standard for our own judgment when we judge others. "Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). I would hate to err on the side of judgment, to judge someone falsely who had truly repented. So again, if I err, I want to err on the side of grace because I know that God will be much more gracious towards me than if I err in judging a person wrongly. I don't want to be guilty of that.

It's easy to fall into legalism. Beware of this temptation and taking the hard stand. I have found that when a person gets heavy into Reformation theology, they usually get heavy into legalism. They make sure the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted just right. Reformation theology has some good points, but so does a porcupine. When you embrace it too forcefully, it's going to hurt.

Some people object because they feel that I gloss over certain passages of Scripture, and they're correct. But glossing over controversial issues is often deliberate because there are usually two sides. And I have found that it's important not to be divisive so that people don't become polarized on issues, because the moment they are polarized, division results.

A classic example is the problem in our understanding of the Scriptures that refer to the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The Bible actually teaches both, but in our human understanding they're mutually exclusive. People who become divisive on this issue claim that we can't believe both, because if you carry the sovereignty of God to an extreme, it eliminates the responsibility of man. Likewise, if you carry the responsibility of man to the extreme, it eliminates the sovereignty of God. This mistake is made when a person takes doctrine and carries it out to its logical conclusion. Using human logic and carrying divine sovereignty out to its logical conclusion leaves man with no choices.

So, how are we to deal with rightly dividing the Word on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man? We need to believe both of them through faith, because I can't keep them in balance by my understanding. I don't understand how they come together. But I do believe them both. I believe God is sovereign, and I also believe I'm responsible and God holds me responsible for the choices that I make. I simply trust God that both assertions of Scripture are true.

There's a pastor who recently came out with a little pamphlet on Calvinism, and on the front cover there's a balance scale with John Calvin on one side and John 3:16 on the other. Which side would you rather stand for?

Don't get polarized. Don't let the people get polarized. The minute you do, you've lost half your congregation because people are split pretty evenly on this issue. So if you take a polarized position you'll lose half of your congregation. Do you really want to lose fifty percent of your congregation?

You know the beautiful thing about being called Calvary Chapel? People don't know where you really stand. Put Baptist in your title, and people know where you are, and half the people will never come because it's a Baptist church. Put Presbyterian in your name, and they know where you stand, and half the people will never come because they know what the Presbyterians believe. Put Nazarene in your name, and immediately they've got you pigeonholed. They know who you are and they don't need to go.

But Calvary Chapel has sort of a mystique about it. "What do these people believe?"

"I don't know, but let's go find out."

And the whole field is yours. You want to fish in as big a pond as you can find. When you're marketing something, you want the largest market appeal possible. So don't chop up the market and say, "Well, we're just going to fish in this little market here." Keep the market broad. Fish in the big pond. Fish where they are biting.



CHAPTER SIX

THE PRIORITY OF THE WORD

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

1 TIMOTHY 4:13

ANOTHER PRIMARY DISTINCTIVE of Calvary Chapel is the endeavor to declare to people the whole counsel of God. We see this principle illustrated when Paul met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. As they were on the shore of the Aegean at Miletus, around the coastal area of Ephesus, Paul said that he was innocent of the blood of all men, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Now, how is it possible for a person to claim to have declared "the whole counsel of God"? The only way a person could make that claim would be if he taught through the whole Word of God with them, from Genesis to Revelation. Once a pastor has taken his congregation through the Bible, then he can say to them, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

This can't be done with teaching only topical sermons. Topical sermons are good, and they have their place, but when you're preaching topically, you're prone by nature to preach only those topics that you like. There are topics in the Bible that aren't very inspiring, and they don't excite people, but they are necessary issues that need to be addressed. When you are preaching topically, the human tendency is to avoid controversial or difficult topics. As a result, people will not gain a well-balanced view of God's truth. So the value of going straight through the Bible is that you can say, "I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God."

I believe I can say to the people at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, "I have declared unto you the whole counsel of God." I have taken them from Genesis to Revelation eight times. Soon we will be beginning the ninth round. We don't skip anything. That's why in the majority of the Calvary Chapels, and the most successful ones, you'll find systematic teaching of the entire Word of God, going through the Bible from cover to cover.

The teaching ministry of Calvary Chapel is expositional in style. It doesn't mean that on occasion a pastor won't address a particular topic or give topical messages. I'm not saying topical messages are wrong or evil—they have their place. We don't want to fall into strict legalism where we analyze every sermon to see if it was homiletically correct and expositionally presented. But for the most part we seek to follow the example of Isaiah.

The Word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little (Isaiah 28:13).

These verses are describing the people's reaction to Isaiah's style of teaching.

Isaiah had an effective method, but they were making fun of him. They were complaining about him, mockingly saying that he ought to go back and teach the kindergartners because his teaching was "precept upon precept, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." They said these words in derision. Yet it's so important to take the people through the Word, line upon line, precept by precept. When we do, we are delivering to them the whole counsel of God.

Another advantage of teaching the whole counsel of God is that when you come to difficult issues that deal with problems in an individual's life or within the church body, you can address them straightforwardly. You don't need to worry about people thinking, *Oh, he's aiming at me today*. People in the congregation know that it's simply the passage of Scripture being studied that day and they realize that you're going straight through the Bible. You're not jumping from topic to topic, but rather teaching straight through the entire Word of God.

In Nehemiah we read when the children of Israel had returned from captivity and were rebuilding the city, the leadership gathered the people together and constructed a little platform. They began early in the morning to read the Word of God to the people. Nehemiah 8:8 declares, "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

I believe this is a worthy definition of expositional preaching—to read the Word, give the sense, and cause the people to understand the meaning. I have found that many times I really don't begin to grasp the meaning of a particular passage until I have read it maybe fifty or sixty times. Suddenly it begins to come together in my own mind.

It's valuable to use good commentaries to help in understanding the meaning of a passage. I appreciate the insights God has given to other men on the Word. But in saying that I appreciate and do read

commentaries, I must also confess that often I will read pages and pages from commentaries and get absolutely nothing that I can use.

Sometimes when I read several commentaries on a particular passage, I'm more confused when I've finished than when I started, because there are just too many different concepts or ideas on a particular passage. I believe that one of the best commentaries on the Bible is the Bible itself.

In teaching the Word of God, it is important to remember that you won't generally see immediate or spectacular results overnight. It takes time to whet and develop the appetite of the people for the Word of God. It takes time for them to grow. For most Calvary Chapels that are planted in a new area, it takes a couple of years to lay a foundation, prepare the ground, plow the hardened soil, work the soil, and plant the seed in the fertile soil. Then wait. The seed doesn't bear fruit overnight. The seed has to grow and develop, but eventually, it begins to bear fruit.

Most of the fellows who have gone out to plant a church, by the end of the second year they have hit the crisis point. They're usually discouraged. They start believing that the people there are different from other people, and that it's just not going to happen.

You would be amazed at how many pastors have gone out, and after two years have called me up saying they were going to leave the ministry because it just wasn't happening. I encourage them to stay for just another six months or so, telling them, "Look, you've come through the hard part. You've been through the plowing. You've been through cultivating the soil. You've been through the planting. Now wait and watch to see if any fruit will come forth." As a general rule, it's in the third year that you begin to see fruit as a result of planting the Word of God in the hearts of the people. "The seed that falls on good soil

will bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold" (Matthew 13:8 *NKJV*). But it doesn't happen overnight.

This can be rather discouraging when there are those who come in with a flash and a fire and seem to generate an immediate crowd. People throng to see the miracles, to watch the fireworks—these other guys seem to have instant success. But here you are just plodding along, teaching the Word of God, Genesis through Revelation, and you cannot see much development or growth. But as the Lord said to Daniel, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

On the Fourth of July it's fun to watch the fireworks, the skyrocket, the blazes of glory, and all the colored sparkles filling the sky. Everybody is "oohing and aahing," but it only lasts for a short time. Before you know it, it's just ashes. It's a big flash and then it's all over. That's the way many ministries are—just a big flash and then it's over.

You have to determine which sky you want to shine in. Do you want to shine as a star forever and ever? Or do you want to be like a skyrocket with a sudden flash, coming on the scene dramatically, but with no staying power?



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ...”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT characteristics of Calvary Chapel is the centrality of Jesus Christ in worship. We dissuade any practice or behavior that would distract people from focusing on Him. For example, Calvary Chapel discourages people from standing up individually when we're singing in the church. The moment a person stands, those near him become aware of him and begin to wonder, "Why is he standing?" The focus is taken off Jesus and placed onto the person who's standing.

The eye is interesting because it's attracted to motion. In many cases, I've seen those who stand up by themselves in worship conclude they're not getting quite enough attention, so they raise their hands and start to sway. That's eye-catching, but it's also a distraction. Suddenly people are wondering why they're standing there.

I believe it's important for these things to be dealt with because displays like these may cause you to lose prospective members to the church. If I went into a church and that was happening, I might think that the sermon was great, but I might feel uncomfortable about all these other things.

A while back I was at a Calvary Chapel and they allowed the people to stand individually. Every night they had one fellow who was down in the front row, and he was more than just standing—he was dancing. It was obvious that the fellow didn't have all of his marbles, and no doubt he had certain psychological needs. He found an environment where he could do his little weird things and be accepted, but it was extremely distracting. I spoke to the pastor about it, and he defended the practice, so I thought, *All right, stay small.*

At Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, if someone stands up, the ushers will gently approach them and invite them back to the foyer. Once there, one of the pastors will speak to them in love. They usually say, "We don't practice this because we've discovered that it draws people's attention away from worship. And surely you wouldn't want to take people's attention from Jesus Christ and put it on yourself."

We let them know that they are drawing attention to themselves, and people are looking at them and the central focus on Jesus is lost. We talk to them in love and suggest that they not do it. If they get upset, it shows that they were in the flesh the whole time. If they're in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit, they will take it in the Spirit. They'll say, "Oh, I didn't realize that. I'm sorry." But if they get all huffy, then you know they were in the flesh.

Jesus said, "Take heed that you do not show your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). He then illustrated how people sought

to bring attention to themselves as they performed their righteous acts of worship. Like it or not, if you're standing and swaying when everyone else is sitting, it will attract attention to you.

I was in another Calvary Chapel where down in the front they had these ladies dressed in granny outfits with bonnets doing interpretive dancing to the worship choruses. Now, if there was anything that was distracting to me, that was it. They were pretty good as far as graceful movements, but I found that I really didn't get much out of the worship that night. I watched these ladies and their graceful movements, just trying to understand their interpretation of the songs. So, again I spoke to the pastor afterwards, and he got the picture and has since stopped this interpretive dancing, realizing that it was distracting.

Calvary Chapel had an affiliate church in Basil, Switzerland that was probably one of the most exciting churches in Europe. As far as potential and what was happening, it was perhaps the largest Protestant church in Europe at the time. Every year I would go over to Basil and speak in their fellowship. It was really exciting to see how they had caught the whole Calvary Chapel vision. They had great worship and the teaching of the Word.

They had hundreds of young people who were coming on Sunday nights to this beautiful Gothic-styled church that the state church had allowed them to use. The state church was using it only on Sunday mornings, and since only six elderly people attended, the bishop said that Calvary Chapel could use it on Sunday nights. It was jammed to the rafters and really had a great outreach doing a vital work. They had opened up a coffee shop and had a great program dealing with the hippie, drug-oriented kids.

The church was located in the center of a drug-infested area, and the kids that were being saved needed housing, so the church provided

it for them. The church had also developed factories to manufacture various types of novelty souvenirs, and that was a successful venture too. The kids were employed and those with artistic gifts were able to use their painting ability. It was going great.

Sadly, the last time I was there I saw that they had gotten into interpretive dancing with a couple of gals in leotards. They had brought in an assistant pastor from a Pentecostal background, and people had begun standing during worship, but the pastor was not strong enough to deal with it. Actually, he wasn't even in control of the meeting. I noticed that when the time had come for me to be introduced to speak, these gals went up, whispered in his ear, and then they sang one more chorus and performed one more dance. The dancers were in control of the meeting, not the pastor. As I talked to him about it, he was reluctant to really face up to the issue. As a result, we don't have any church in Basil today. He left, the Pentecostals took over, the state church kicked them out, and now there is no work going on there.

It's important that we keep Jesus Christ the central focus and keep distractions to a minimum. When distractions do take place, deal with them and if necessary, publicly talk about them.

When I was in Bible college, there was a fellow who would always sit down in the front row. Then at one of the most powerful moments in the service, when the Spirit of God was really working in the people's hearts, he would start to lean over and then stand up, hands raised, yelling, "Hallelujah!" Everybody would laugh. But then everybody's attention was on this character crying, "Hallelujah!" The point of the sermon was lost. He destroyed so many sermons because of his actions.

So I determined I was going to stop it. Once I sat in the row right behind him, and when he leaned over to go into his "Hallelujah"

bit, I grabbed his shoulders and held him down. Nobody else had the courage to stop him. They just let it go on and on, and it was so distracting.

A few years back I was in Colorado Springs at a retreat, and there was a man down in the front who was sort of a simpleton. While we were all singing worship choruses, this man was dancing up and down in the aisle. Later I asked the pastor, "Why do you allow that?" He said, "Well, they wanted to have freedom."

"Look, that isn't freedom," I replied. "If I were a stranger coming into your church for the first time, and saw this guy dancing down in the front, I would think it was weird. I wouldn't come back."

We get to the place where we accept things that are wrong because we don't have the courage to stop them. We're afraid of being accused of quenching the Spirit. I will quench that kind of spirit! Not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit that is seeking to bring attention to an individual, distracting people from the worship of the Lord.

A long time ago we had some people get up during the service and try to give an utterance in tongues. Again, the ushers were right on top of it. They invited them back to the foyer, and the pastors explained to them that at Calvary we don't allow public utterances in tongues or public prophecies, as in the Charismatic or Pentecostal churches.

From the pulpit I then explained to the congregation that the gift of tongues is valid in the New Testament, and that there is a proper place for tongues. I explained that Paul pointed out that, in his personal experience, he would rather speak five words in a known tongue than ten thousand in an unknown tongue when he's in the church. Yet he was thankful that he spoke in tongues more than all of them.

In your private devotions, it's a very edifying experience. It's a means by which you can praise God and worship God. But with a church the size of Calvary Chapel, where some people are not able to hear the interpretation at all, it's not edifying in our public services to exercise this particular gift of the Spirit, even with an interpretation. It isn't edifying or convenient, so we don't do it. We don't allow it during the public services, but we encourage people to use and exercise this gift in their own personal devotional life.

If you have a group of believers and you're gathered for prayer to seek the Lord, then the use of the gift of tongues is allowable with interpretation. But I believe that when there are unbelievers present, it creates confusion and questions. Therefore, it is best to confine it to believers who are gathered together specifically to wait upon the Lord, as in an afterglow setting. It's edifying and allowable there because people are simply seeking the Lord and the fullness of His Spirit. So in that environment it's allowable.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:29, "No flesh should glory in His presence." I wonder if we realize just how serious a matter it is to try to bring attention to ourselves in the presence of the Lord. Do we really want to distract people's attention away from Jesus Christ and draw it to ourselves? I think that's a very serious offense. And I surely wouldn't want to be guilty of it.

In the Old Testament when Israel had completed the tabernacle and all its furnishings, Moses gathered the people to dedicate it and to begin offering sacrifices. The congregation of Israel assembled together and everybody was in place. Aaron was in his priestly robes, as were his sons, and the whole scene was all in order according to the plan of God.

Then suddenly, as the people were waiting to start things, the fire of God was kindled on the altar. It was a spontaneous combustion. All

the people saw this sign of God's presence and broke forth with great shouting. There was great excitement and boundless emotion at the realization that God was present among His people.

Then the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, took false fire and put it in their incense burners. They started to offer this incense before the Lord inside the Holy Place, when Scripture says that fire came from the altar and consumed both Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10).

It's my belief that Nadab and Abihu got caught up in the emotion and the excitement of the moment. They were going to demonstrate to the people their position as priests and how important "we are." As a result, they were consumed.

I'm very leery of strange fire. You want to be very careful about strange fire—those emotions that don't stem from God Himself, and the kind of service that doesn't originate with God. It's an endeavor to draw attention to the instrument rather than to the Master.

We see this in the early church with Ananias and Sapphira. Here again is an attempt to draw praise and glory to the individual. Ananias and Sapphira had sold their property and brought a portion of the proceeds to the church, but they pretended they were giving everything. I believe this was an attempt to draw the praise and the awe of the people, who would then say, "Look at that. They're giving everything to God!" when in reality they were holding back.

We all like that kind of attention. We like it when people think we're spiritual. Be careful! Our flesh is so rotten. We want to be known as deeply spiritual people. Our flesh revels in people thinking that we're more spiritual than we really are. Sometimes we purposefully try to give off this impression, and I think this has been one of the curses of the church.

Some pastors seek to present an image of deep spirituality that just isn't real. It begins to affect their actions. They begin to get a voice that sounds holy, they hold their hands in a special way, and then they say, "Oh, dear sister, tell me all about it." Their whole manner changes and their demeanor gives off an impression of a holy man. And they love it. They love people to think they're spiritual giants. They want people to know the Word like they know it, or to think that they spend hours in prayer. They just smile and say, "It takes a lot of commitment, you know."

We really need to be cautious about creating an aura around ourselves and loving the adulation that comes from people. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, they were zapped because they drew attention and glory to themselves—glory that should have been drawn to the Lord. And they paid a severe price. God doesn't want to share His glory. Be careful. Don't allow distractions. We want to keep Jesus Christ as the central focus in worship.



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

TITUS 2:13

THE RAPTURE REFERS to that time when Jesus is going to come, without warning, and take away His church from this earth. After the rapture, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon this sinful world.

There are many pastors who claim an ignorance of the rapture or say they are uncertain whether it will precede the tribulation. They don't really know where they stand. I don't believe there is any excuse for not having a position on this issue. We have our Bibles and we're capable of studying this subject thoroughly. I believe that your view of the rapture will have a significant impact on the success of your ministry.

Jesus promised He would come again when He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told

you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). The Lord promises to come again and to receive His disciples unto Himself, that where He is, we might be also.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul declared, "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). A mystery in the New Testament means something that has not yet been revealed by God in the progressive revelation of Himself, His purposes and plans to man. Paul said to the Colossians, "What is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). The Old Testament prophets did not comprehend what it meant that Christ would be in us. Even the angels desire to fully grasp these things (1 Peter 1:12).

When the Bible declares we will "all be changed," it means there will be a metamorphosis. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53). All believers will go through a glorious change at the coming of Jesus Christ for His church.

The Thessalonians were having a problem understanding this issue. Paul only ministered there for a couple of weeks, but in that short time he taught them many things. One of the things he taught them concerned the rapture of the church. The Thessalonians were looking for the coming kingdom.

I believe it is God's intention that every church age be convinced they are the last generation. I also believe that God's divine design is for the church to live in constant expectancy of the Lord's return. In talking

about His return Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:46).

The early church believed that Jesus would set up His kingdom immediately. In the first chapter of Acts, the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). "Are we just a few days away?" They were excited because they were expecting the Lord to set up the kingdom at any time.

Jesus responded by saying, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power. But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:7-8).

There was a rumor in the early church that the Lord would come back before John died. Every time John got a cold or a sore throat the whole church would get excited. So John wrote in the gospel to clarify what Jesus had said.

Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" You follow Me. Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:21-23 *NKJV*).

John took note of the point Jesus didn't say that he wasn't going to die. He said, "If I will ..." So John sought to correct the mistaken notion that Jesus would come back before he died.

The Thessalonians were looking for the Lord to come, but some of their dear brethren in the church at Thessalonica had died, and still Jesus had not returned. They believed that because they had died before Jesus came back, they would miss out on the glorious kingdom.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul corrected this mistaken idea that if a person died before Jesus came back, they would miss out on the kingdom.

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NKJV).

Paul believed that he would probably be alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. He emphasized that we would not precede those who sleep.

There are people who say, "I don't believe in the rapture of the church," because they have looked through the Bible and have never found the word "rapture." But in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we read the words "caught up." The translation of "caught up" in the Greek is *harpazo*, which means "to be taken away by force." It's usually used as a military term related to the taking of hostages. The *Latin Vulgate* translates *harpazo* as *raptuse*, and that's where we get our English word "rapture." Jesus will return to rapture His church. That's the first event.

The second event is the second coming of Jesus Christ, when He comes again *with His church* to establish His kingdom upon the earth. The rapture, then, is distinct from the second coming of Jesus Christ.

We're told, "Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, amen" (Revelation 1:7). Also Colossians 3:4, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory."

The second coming of Jesus will be to establish God's kingdom upon the earth. But prior to that second coming there will be an event when the church will be caught up to be with the Lord—the rapture. You know what I love most about this event, "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

There is a distinct difference between Jesus coming for His church and Jesus coming with His church. He will be coming for His church at the rapture. But at the second coming, Jesus will be coming with His church.

Jude 14 speaks of the second coming when it states, "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints."

Zechariah also spoke of the second coming when he wrote,

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You (Zechariah 14:4-5 NKJV).

The rapture can take place at any time. There aren't any more prophecies that need to be fulfilled before the rapture occurs. As far as the second coming, there are some prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled before Jesus comes again. The Antichrist must be revealed, and the earth must go through a time of great tribulation and judgment. Jesus spoke about the signs of His coming in Luke 21:28, "And when these things begin to come to pass, [the signs of His second coming] then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws near."

Last year towards the end of October, just before Halloween, I was going by a major mall in Southern California and saw them putting up the Santa Claus, the reindeer, and other Christmas decorations, but it was still October. I said to my wife, "Look at that. They're putting up decorations. That's great, I love Thanksgiving!"

She looked and said, "Those aren't Thanksgiving decorations. They're Christmas decorations."

"I know that. But I also know that Thanksgiving comes before Christmas. So if the signs of Christmas are up, Thanksgiving's getting close."

And in the same way, when we see the signs of the second coming, we know that the rapture is getting close.

Jesus had given His disciples the signs of His coming in response to their question, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?" Jesus had just walked through the temple with His disciples and they were remarking on how huge the stones were. Jesus said, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." When they got over to the Mount of Olives, they asked Jesus, "What shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:2-3).

So they weren't asking for just one set of signs. They were asking for signs of the destruction of the temple, and they were also asking about the signs of the end of this current age of human government and the coming kingdom of God.

They didn't ask, nor did they probably even understand, about the rapture of the church. But Jesus proceeded to give them the signs of the destruction of the temple and the signs of His coming again. When He speaks about the signs of His second coming, He naturally speaks about the great tribulation. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

Jesus also warns them, "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the Holy Place, (whosoever reads, let him understand)" (Matthew 24:15). When you see the abomination standing in the Holy Place, you'll know it's time for you to get out of Jerusalem and flee to the wilderness.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:29-30).

Prior to the second coming of Jesus, there must be the revelation of the Antichrist and the establishing of Satan's kingdom in full power during the great tribulation. But there is nothing that must occur before the rapture of the church. That is why we are told to watch and be ready, "for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes ... blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:44, 46).

Jesus then began to tell them a series of parables. The emphasis of each parable is to watch and be ready for His return at any time. Each parable focuses on the key point that the rapture is imminent. It can happen at any time.

In the parable of the ten virgins we read, "And five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (Matthew 25:2). Those "that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes" (Matthew 25:10-13). The significance throughout is to watch and be ready, because you don't know when the Lord is coming for His servants.

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:42-44).

I firmly believe that the church will not go through the great tribulation. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). Now if Jesus tells me to pray for something, believe me, I'm going to do it. I pray, "Lord, I want to be accounted worthy to escape these things that will come to pass upon the earth." This is in the context of the great tribulation.

When we look at the book of Revelation we see it is divided into three sections: (1) "Write the things which you have seen, (2) and

the things which are, (3) and the things which shall be hereafter" (Revelation 1:19). In chapter 1, John was told to write the things which he had seen and he wrote about the vision he saw of Christ walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, holding the seven stars in His right hand. He wrote about the glorious description of Jesus in His glorified state.

In chapters 2 and 3, he writes about the "things that are." This refers to Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia. I believe these were seven actual churches of that day, also referring to seven periods of church history. I also believe they are representative of churches we have today.

There are churches today that have left their first love. There are churches today that have embraced the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. There's a suffering church of Smyrna in the world today such as those suffering persecution in China, Sudan, and other places. I believe that there's the church of Thyatira which has embodied the doctrine of Mariology. We also see the church of Sardis portrayed in dead Protestantism—"You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1).

I believe that there is the Philadelphian church, which is staying true to the Word. It may not have much power, but thank God He has "set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8). Calvary Chapel may not be big or earthshaking, but thank God it is making an impression by staying true to the Word.

But there is also the Laodicean church, the one that has put Jesus outside. He's standing at the door and knocking, saying, "If any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

In Revelation 4:1, when He's finished with the messages to the churches, He introduces a new section with the Greek word, *metatauta*, meaning "after these things"—the same word used in Revelation 1:19. We need to ask, "After what things?" After the things of chapters 2 and 3—the things of the church. So after the things that pertain to the church we read,

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1 *NKJV*).

After this command John said, "Immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne" (Revelation 4:2). He then describes the throne of God with its emerald rainbow round about and the cherubim as they are worshiping. He sees the twenty-four lesser thrones with the elders sitting on them and watches and observes the heavenly worship as the cherubim are declaring the eternal character, nature, and holiness of God. "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). As they are declaring the holiness of God, the twenty-four elders fall on their faces, take their golden crowns, cast them on the glassy sea, and declare, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for You have created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Then John's attention is drawn to a sealed scroll with seven seals, with writing on the inside and on the outside. An angel proclaims with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (Revelation 5:2). And John writes, "And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon" (Revelation 5:4).

It is my belief that this scroll is the title deed to the earth. According to the Jewish law of redemption, there was an established time you could redeem forfeited or lost property provided you fulfilled the requirements within the deed. We see this illustrated in the story of Ruth when Boaz redeemed the field which belonged to Elimelech in order that he might obtain his bride. We also see this illustrated in Jesus who purchased and paid the price to redeem the world in order that He might have His bride, the church.

We find John weeping because, under Jewish law, if you don't redeem property at that appointed time, it goes to the new owner perpetually. You have one opportunity—after that it permanently belongs to the new owner. The thought of the world forever under Satan's power and control was more than John could handle, until an elder says, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" (Revelation 5:5).

John says that he didn't see Him as a Lion of the tribe of Judah. He saw Him as a Lamb that had been slaughtered (Isaiah 53:2, 5).

And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four beasts and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:7-10).

As you look carefully at the lyrics, we realize that only the church can sing this song. When the Lord is in heaven receiving the title deed to

the earth, we will be in heaven watching Him as He takes the scroll out of the right hand of Him who is sitting on the throne. We will join in this glorious chorus.

In Luke 21, Jesus told His disciples about the signs of His second coming and the great tribulation that would precede the end of the age. When the great tribulation occurs on earth, I expect to be in heaven standing before the Son of Man and singing of the worthiness of the Lamb.

Only the church can sing this song of redemption. If we follow the timing, we see the church singing the song of redemption in chapter 5, before the opening of the scroll in chapter 6, preceding the great tribulation on the earth. Again we read that He has “redeemed us to God by His blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

Revelation 6 describes the great tribulation. As the Lord opens each seal of the scroll, a corresponding judgment is released upon the earth. As the first seal is opened, John writes, “I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). I believe this is the revelation of the Antichrist. Some believe this rider on the white horse is Jesus Christ—but as we examine the passage, we see that it’s followed by war, famine, bloodshed, and a fourth of the people being killed. That doesn’t sound like the kingdom of God and the glorious coming of the Lord.

I believe the forces and power of the Antichrist are in the world today and the only thing keeping them from taking over is the presence of the church. We have a little strength, not much, but enough to keep back the powers of darkness from taking complete control. I don’t believe the Antichrist can take over until the church is removed.

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

This Scripture lines up with Revelation 6 where the church is in heaven as Jesus takes the scroll. As He begins to loose the scroll, the corresponding judgments are released upon the earth. It is the time of the pouring out of God’s wrath.

In Romans 5:9 Paul tells us, “Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” He repeats this in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Romans 1:18 Paul writes, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

The church is not appointed unto wrath. It simply isn’t consistent with the nature of God to judge the righteous with the wicked.

Now it is true that in the world Christians will have tribulation. But what is the source of tribulation against the church? It’s not God. Satan is the source of tribulation. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18), and “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

When Satan is the source of tribulation, you can expect the children of God to be persecuted. But when God is the source of the judgment, it’s a different story. God has already judged our sins on the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus bore the judgment of God for all of our guilt.

Remember when the angels were on their way to destroy Sodom and they stopped by and told Abraham that the sin of Sodom had ascended up into heaven and that they were on their way to check out the reports and destroy the city. Abraham asked them to wait because his nephew Lot was living there.

Abraham drew near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sake." Then Abraham answered and said, "Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." "Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." "Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." "Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten" (Genesis 18:23-32).

And what happened? When the angels came to the city of Sodom, they found one righteous man, Lot, sitting at the gate. We're told in 2 Peter that Lot's righteous spirit was vexed by the way the people were living. Lot, not knowing these individuals were angels, invited them into his home. That night the men of Sodom came and began to beat on the door, saying, "Where are the men which came to you this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them" (Genesis 19:5). They literally wanted to rape them. Lot replied, "I pray you, brethren, do not do so wickedly" (Genesis 19:7).

The angels pulled Lot back as the crowd began to beat down the door. Then the angels smote the men with blindness. We're told that they

continued trying to find the door all night. In the morning, the angels had to carry Lot out of Sodom because they couldn't destroy it until he was gone. Lot is a type of the church that is to be delivered.

[The Lord] delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Peter 2:7-9).

God will deliver the righteous, and He'll also reserve the ungodly for the day of judgment. The basic principle is that the Lord of the earth is righteous. He's fair and He won't destroy the righteous with the wicked. When God is the source of the judgment, then God will deliver the righteous out of judgment.

Earlier God judged the world because of its wickedness with the flood. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). But among all of the unrighteous of the world there was one righteous man, Noah. And God protected and sheltered Noah as His judgment was unleashed. Noah was sealed by God and safely taken through the flood, just as the 144,000 in Revelation 7 are sealed by God so they will not be harmed by the tribulation judgments. Noah is a type of the 144,000 that are sealed and taken through the great tribulation.

During the same period as Noah, there was also one other righteous man, Enoch. "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Enoch is an interesting picture of the church. He was translated, or raptured.

I do not believe that the church will go through the great tribulation. But there are certain Scriptures that people use to try to show that the church will be there. One argument is based on the interpretation of the “last trump.” Paul speaks about the rapture and says, “Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Some try to link this with the seven trumpet judgments of Revelation and say that the seventh trumpet is the last trump. They see this as proof that the rapture will not take place until the last trump occurs, which will be the final judgment.

I see a couple of problems with this. First, the seven trumpet judgments in Revelation are given to the seven angels to sound and to bring in the corresponding judgments upon the earth. When we examine who is blowing each of these trumpets, we see that they are all angels. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul is speaking of the rapture, “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The trumpet of the rapture is not that of an angel. It’s the trump of God.

After the fourth angel sounds his trump, there’s a voice that shouts, “Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!” (Revelation 8:13). After the fifth trumpet sounds, again the voice says, “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter” (Revelation 9:12). It’s clear that it’s a woe that is pronounced to those on the earth. But the church being caught up isn’t a woe—it’s glory.

Another argument that is often given is presented in Revelation 20, as John views the various groups in heaven.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

The point they make is that at the first resurrection John sees those who were beheaded for their witness of Jesus, who didn’t worship the beast or take the image and receive the mark. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Some believe this is solid proof that the church will go through the tribulation and be martyred.

But we need to go back and read it again. In verse 4, we see thrones and to those who sat upon them, and judgment was given. Let’s look back at who these overcomers are. In the message to the overcomers to the church we read, “To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). John sees the church as a part of the first resurrection. Then he sees those who will be martyred during the great tribulation period for their refusal to take the mark of the beast. This is the great number we find in Revelation 7:13-14 where the elder said, “What are these which are arrayed in white robes and where did they come from? And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

But notice they stand in His holy temple and serve Him day and night continually. The church is the bride of Christ. Jesus said, “Henceforth I don’t call you servants; for the servant doesn’t know what his lord

does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). So, we have this second group comprised of the martyred saints during the great tribulation period. They will become a part of the kingdom, but the church will have already been raptured. And that's a far better way to go than through martyrdom in the great tribulation period.

In Revelation 10 we read more about the seventh trumpet. It says, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He has declared to His servants the prophets" (Revelation 10:7). "Days" is plural, but the rapture will take place in a moment, in the "twinkling of an eye." Therefore, we really can't relate the last trump with the seventh trumpet of Revelation. The seventh trumpet of Revelation will take place over the "days" of the sounding of the seventh trumpet. In contrast, when the trump of God sounds, we will be changed in a moment.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:29-31).

We see here that immediately after the tribulation of those days, Jesus appears to the whole world. Then He gathers together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

But some say, "Isn't the church the elect?" Yes. The church is the elect, but Israel is also the elect. This is a reference to Israel, and you can

cross reference it with several passages of the Old Testament where the same thing is declared. God will gather together the Jews from all over the world. In this passage, Jesus is speaking about His elect, the Jewish nation, not the church. Isaiah said, "And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12). Israel will be regathered.

What about the Scriptures that speak about the Antichrist making war against the saints? Daniel tells us in 7:21, "I beheld, and the same horn [the Antichrist] made war with the saints, and prevailed against them." In Revelation 13:7 we read, "And it was given unto him [the Antichrist] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

Who are the saints? They can't be the church because Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The fact that he makes war on the saints and prevails against them means that they are the Jewish saints, not the church.

I do not believe that the church will see the Antichrist empowered upon the earth. I would not be surprised if the Antichrist is already one of the main figures on the world scene today. But I do not believe the church will see the Antichrist display his full power on the earth.

Paul tells us about this man of sin, the son of perdition, and declares,

And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [will do so] until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 NKJV).

I do not believe that the Antichrist can take over the rule and authority of the earth while the church is still here. I believe that the Holy Spirit within the church is the restraining force that is holding back the powers of darkness from completely engulfing and overwhelming the world right now. But the moment the church is removed, there will be nothing to hinder or hold back the powers of darkness from taking total control. "That which restrains shall restrain until He is taken out of the way. Then shall the man of sin, the son of perdition, be revealed."

This is the reason why I'm not looking for the Antichrist. This is just another subtle and deceitful device of Satan that leads people to be looking for the Antichrist rather than looking for Jesus Christ.

The reason some people get their prophetic scenarios confused is because they spiritualize and make the church Israel. They say that God is through with the nation of Israel because they rejected the Messiah. They believe that God has discarded Israel and replaced it with the church, and the church is now "the Israel of God." They take those prophecies that refer to Israel as a nation and make them apply to the church. This confuses the whole prophetic picture.

If the sun came up this morning, then God's covenant with Israel still stands. He said, "As long as the sun comes up, My covenant with Israel shall stand." God is not through with Israel. In the book of Hosea God says, "Go back and get her again. Wash her off, clean her up, and take her back." The book of Daniel says that God still has a seven-year pact to fulfill with Israel, during which He will deal with them again in a direct way.

In the Old Testament we see that Enoch is a type of the church who was translated—or raptured—before the judgment of the flood. Daniel, I believe, is also a type of the church. Do you remember when

Nebuchadnezzar built his great image and demanded that everybody bow down? I believe that this is a type of the image that the Antichrist will build, set in the temple, and demand that everyone worship. Nebuchadnezzar required everyone to bow down to the great image at the sound of the music. So when the music sounded, they all bowed down, with the exception of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Chaldeans reported to Nebuchadnezzar, "Hey, there are three Hebrew boys over here who didn't bow. The music sounded, and they're just standing there."

So he called in the three Hebrew boys and said, "What's this I hear? You didn't bow? We'll give you another chance, but if you don't bow you'll be thrown into the burning, fiery furnace." They replied, "King, we're not even careful how we answer you in this matter, because the God that we serve is able to deliver us out of your fiery furnace, and even if He doesn't, we still won't bow."

I love that kind of grit! You don't stop men like that.

Nebuchadnezzar was so angry that he had the furnace heated seven times hotter than ever before. The three Hebrews were thrown in and the men that threw them in were burned to death, just because they got close to the fire. But the only thing that burned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were the ropes by which the Chaldeans bound them.

Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and asked, "How many did we throw in there?"

They answered, "Three."

"Then how come I see four? They're walking around in the middle of the fire. And the fourth one looks like the Son of God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, come out of there!"

When they came out, not a hair was singed. There wasn't even the smell of smoke. Everybody was amazed and Nebuchadnezzar, great at making proclamations, said, "I proclaim there's no god in all the earth like the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who was able to deliver from the burning, fiery furnace!"

But where was Daniel when this was happening? Do you think Daniel bowed before the image? If you do, you know a different Daniel than I know. Back in the first chapter, Daniel had purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself, even with the king's meat. I don't believe that the man who had such purpose of heart would ever bow. Daniel was probably away doing the king's business. Daniel becomes a type of the church which is removed when the Antichrist sets up his image and demands to be worshiped. We, the church, will be taking care of business elsewhere, in the heavenly scene.

When you realize that the source of the tribulation is God, it automatically precludes God's people being involved. It wouldn't be just, or consistent, for God to judge the righteous with the wicked.

Second Peter confirms that God spared the righteous but brought the flood upon the world of the ungodly. That's what the judgment is about. It's targeted at the world of the ungodly. God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Peter 2:9). This declares the clear purposes of God.

I believe that through the Old Testament types, such as Lot, Noah, Enoch and Daniel, we see the truth that the church will not be here during the great tribulation.

Scripture plainly states, "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

"Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:9).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18)—but this doesn't describe the child of God.

I believe God wants every church age to believe that it is the last. Believing this has a three-fold effect. First, it gives us an urgency for the work that we are doing, to get the gospel out. We don't have much time so we should "lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us." We need to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). What we're called to do, we need to do quickly. There's an urgency to our work. We need to get the message out because we don't have much time. The Lord is returning soon.

Secondly, it gives a correct perspective of material things. The material world is going to burn. Jesus said, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20). He said, "Use the unrighteousness of mammon for eternal purposes." If God blesses you financially, that's great. But use it for eternal purposes. Jesus' imminent return gives the correct balance between the things of the Spirit and the material things of the world. Recognize that the material world is rapidly passing away and only those things that are eternal will last. Knowing that we have only one life which will soon be past, recognize that only what we do for Christ will last. This gives us the proper perspective.

Thirdly, it reminds us to maintain a purity in our lives. Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:46). I don't want the Lord to come and find me cruising pornographic sites on the Internet. Imagine! Believing that Jesus will return at any time keeps a purity in our lives. The Lord could come today.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doesn't yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

This gives us a purifying hope. That's why I believe it's important that we keep this distinctive of believing in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and not compromise it.

I am looking for the Lord of heaven to come and snatch me away that I might be with Him. As He said, "Watch therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

This is my prayer and it is my expectation—and it could happen at any time. I do believe that the Lord intended us to live in this anticipation in every age of the church.

I believe that the hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ is the spark that God has used to bring revival throughout the church—the fact that we don't have much time. The Lord is coming soon. We are living at the very edge. As Paul said, "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).

May God help us to maintain that blessed hope and bring it to all people in order:

1. To know the urgency of living for Jesus Christ completely.
2. To have the right priority concerning the things of the world which so easily grasp onto us and hold us back.
3. To maintain lives of purity.
4. To keep our hearts and lives pure in serving the Lord knowing that He might come at any moment.

I want to be watching and I want to be ready to meet Jesus when He comes. I don't want to be doing anything that would be dragging me down or holding me back. I want to be ready for my Lord.

I believe it is so important that we proclaim this teaching of the rapture and keep people watching and hoping because without that, what hope do we have in the world today? We need to keep people focused on the truth that a better day is coming very soon. Be ready! The Lord is coming for His people, and He is going to take us to be with Him forever.



CHAPTER NINE

HAVING BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit ...”

2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-6

CALVARY CHAPEL IS a work that was begun by the Spirit. Every new and great movement of God is born of the Spirit. When we examine church history and the various great movements of God, we discover they were all born in the Spirit. Yet historically, such moves of God seem to deviate from that birth in the Spirit to ultimately seeking to be perfected in the flesh. This seems to be a continual cycle in the history of the church. Movements that were once alive in the Spirit become dead in ritualism.

Ritualism is nothing more than a rut, and the only difference between a rut and a grave is the length and depth. We see the energies of the church expended in life-support systems designed to keep a corpse still gasping for breath. The whole purpose seems to be concentrated in not letting the movement die. We believe that if a program cannot survive on its own, the most merciful thing to do is let it die.

In the book of Judges we read of the continuing cycle of infidelity on the part of the Israelites. It's almost disgusting to see how the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and how the Lord gave them over to their enemies. They would be in bondage, and then after about forty years, they would cry to the Lord. God would hear them and would send a deliverer, and things would go great for a while. But the children of Israel would do evil again in the sight of the Lord, and again they would go into captivity. We see this same cycle in our lives. When things are going great, we have a tendency to slack off. And then when we get into trouble, we cry unto the Lord. Every time I read Judges, I get upset with the children of Israel. I think, *How can you turn your back on the Lord? Can't you see what's going on? Can't you see the cycle that is taking place?*

As I look at church history, I see much the same thing. God raises up a new movement. It's born of the Spirit. There's excitement and revival. There's a powerful moving of the Spirit. Consider some of the modern movements when God used men like John Wesley and Martin Luther. It is evident that the power and the anointing of the Spirit were on their lives. Yet when we examine the Methodist and Lutheran churches today, with few exceptions they are laced with modernism. There is a great dearth of the Spirit, even a denying of the power and gifts of the Spirit—but the movements were born of the Spirit.

And so goes the history of the church. So God raises up a new work and begins a new movement.

Calvary Chapel happens to be in the first part of the cycle. The Spirit of God moved, is moving, and has raised up a new work. It was begun in the Spirit. As the Lord said to Zechariah, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, churches begun in the Spirit, and chided them. "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). God will go to tremendous lengths to make certain that His chosen leaders rely on the Spirit and not on their own power and wisdom.

It's interesting to observe the men whom God has used, the men that He has raised up to lead the people in the way of the Lord.

Moses is one example. You remember the story of the burning bush. When God called him, Moses initially objected, saying, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Moses said, "Lord, I don't have any confidence. Who am I? I've been out here for forty years." I imagine that he expected to spend the rest of his life simply watching sheep. He figured that was his lot in life. So when the Lord called him, he responded, "Who am I? I don't have any confidence, Lord." It's interesting to note that Moses started out with a lot of confidence and had a sense of destiny at one time, but the Lord knocked it out of him.

It's a good illustration of the difference between the work of the flesh and the work of the Spirit. Moses first endeavored to do the work of God in the energies of his flesh, but in his own power he couldn't even successfully bury one Egyptian. Yet when he was directed by the Spirit, Israel succeeded in burying the whole army of the Egyptians.

I think most of us can relate to Moses' experience. We so often begin in the flesh to fulfill what we feel the call of God is upon our lives and find it unsuccessful. I think that when a person fails in the flesh, he often heads for the desert and leaves the ministry, many times never to return. He becomes discouraged and defeated, because he tried in the ability of his flesh to fulfill what he genuinely felt was the call of God upon his heart.

Moses did just that. He felt the call of God upon his heart. He knew that God had ordained him for a purpose, but then he found himself out in the desert for forty years. During this time, he had lost his self-worth and confidence. But God's answer to Moses' objection was, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exodus 3:12). To me, that's glorious! "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Then Moses answered in Exodus 4:1, "Lord, I don't have credibility. They're not going to believe me. They're just going to say that the Lord hasn't talked to me."

God's response to Moses' objection was, "What is in your hand?"

He said, "A rod."

God said, "Throw it on the ground." And then, through a series of signs the Lord assured Moses that He would be with him.

In Exodus 4:10 Moses pleaded, "I have no ability. I'm not eloquent. I have slow speech and a slow tongue."

To this objection God said, "Who made man's mouth? Who gave you the ability to speak?" God is able to overcome our disabilities. He's the one who created our mouths.

And then in verse 13, Moses said, "Lord, get someone else to do the job. I have no desire. I don't want to do it. Just get someone else."

Here is where the Lord became upset with Moses and went to an alternate plan. He used Aaron to be Moses' spokesman, but that was God's alternate plan. It's sad, but we often miss God's best and force Him to choose plan B.

I do believe in a direct will and a permissive will of God. I believe that God will lift us to the highest level that we will allow, and do the best

for us on that level. But I also believe that oftentimes we force God to our level rather than being elevated to His. We bring God down in a compromise to our level of commitment.

Look what God had to go through in order to get this man Moses—a man with no confidence, no credibility, no ability, no desire, and yet chosen by God to deliver the people.

In the book of Judges, when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and began to worship false gods, God delivered them into the hands of the Midianites. The Midianites covered the land like grasshoppers. They took the crops as soon as they were ready to harvest. The children of Israel began to cry unto the Lord because of their bondage and misery. So the Lord sent His angel to Gideon who was threshing wheat by a winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

The angel of the Lord said to Gideon, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites" (Judges 6:14).

And Gideon responded, "Oh Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). "Lord, You're scraping the bottom of the barrel. My family is poor and I'm the least of my family."

He thought he was disqualifying himself, but in reality he was the kind of person God was looking for. God desired to use a person who knew that he didn't have the capacity or the ability to accomplish the deliverance of a nation—a person who knew he would have to rely upon the Lord if anything was to be done.

God also had to bring Moses to this place so that He could use him too. When we don't have confidence in our own power, we know that if the work is going to be done, it has to be done by the Lord.

When I felt the call of God on my life to the ministry, I went to Bible college and prepared myself. While in Bible college, I was senior class president, student body president, and I developed an athletic program for the school. I really felt that I had a lot to offer. When I started out in the ministry, I was certain that I had all the qualifications and background to build a successful church anywhere.

I had great confidence, but the Lord put me through the ringer. He allowed me to struggle for seventeen years without success. I had to work in secular jobs in order to support my family and stay in the ministry. If it weren't for that sense of God's call upon my life, I would have given up. In fact, I endeavored to leave the ministry on a couple of occasions, but the Lord brought me back. This all had to happen because of the confidence I had in my own abilities.

The Lord allowed me to spend the prime years of my life failing, until He finally got me to the place where I realized I had nothing to offer. Then I began to simply lean on the Spirit and depend upon Him. It was then that I was able to watch God work by His Spirit. I wasn't tempted to take the glory for what God was doing. He brought me to the cross and emptied me of myself and my ambitions. When God began to work by His Spirit, it became a joyful, thrilling experience just to see what God was able to do.

Many times there is the necessity for this emptying process. When Gideon said, "Lord, my family is one of the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family," rather than disqualifying himself, he was actually affirming that God had found the kind of a man He was looking for—one who would not take credit or glory for the victories, but would give God the glory.

It's interesting that when God did use Gideon, and the Midianites were scattered and defeated, they came to Gideon and said, "Rule

over us." And Gideon responded, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23). That's the kind of man God was looking for.

I look at the men whom God gathered around David. Everyone was in distress, in debt, and discontented. They gathered themselves to him and he became the captain. They were a bunch of malcontents and losers, about 400 men, but God raised them into a mighty army.

I also look at the men whom God gathered around me and I sort of chuckle. They're much like David's men, sort of the outcasts and castoffs of society, and yet look what God has done.

When God called Jeremiah, he responded, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jeremiah 1:6). When Jesus called His disciples, He chose fishermen and a tax collector. He didn't go to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and say, "Now, Gamaliel, who are your sharpest and finest students here?" He went to the sea of Galilee and called fishermen.

So Calvary Chapel is not the first time that God has used society's castoffs to do a wonderful work. But it's somewhat sad that once God begins to use us, we start looking for reasons why God would use us. We try to become perfected in the flesh.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul said, "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Corinthians 1:26). He's admonishing them to observe that God hasn't called many qualified people—not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.

He goes on to say, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of

the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

He then gives us the reason in verse 29, "that no flesh should glory in His presence." The whole purpose of God is to choose those who really aren't qualified, but then to anoint them with His Spirit. Then, when the results are forthcoming, it's an amazement and a wonder to the world. He doesn't desire that any flesh should glory in His presence.

Luke tells us that the disciples returned with excitement over the work of God through their lives. In that hour, while they were talking about it, Jesus was rejoicing in His Spirit. And He said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Luke 10:21). Jesus was thanking the Father that He hid these things from the wise and the prudent and revealed them to the simple people, because it seemed good in His sight.

Having begun in the Spirit, so often we then seek to be perfected in the flesh.

Some of the Calvary Chapel pastors have gone back to school. Some schools were quite anxious to enroll them because of their success in the ministry—to honor them as having received degrees from their programs and to be associated with their success in the ministry—so they offered them life experience credits. These pastors were able to take a few courses, and with all their life experience credits, they were able to get their degrees. Now the schools point to them as success examples of their graduates.

The reason some of the fellows went back to school to get degrees was because during interviews, they're always being asked, "What degrees do you have?" And it is kind of embarrassing to say, "Well, I don't have any degrees."

"What seminary did you attend?"

"I didn't attend seminary."

"What university did you attend?"

"Well, I didn't quite get my high school diploma."

It can be embarrassing to admit you don't have an educational background. When *Who's Who* writes you and says you've been selected to be in this year's edition, they want to know what degrees you have and what universities you attended because man wants to be able to say, "Well, look, this man has a Ph.D." Somehow we feel we can be perfected and even prepared in the flesh. We've begun in the Spirit and the only way to have continuing success is to continue in the Spirit.

Again Jesus says in Matthew 11:25, "I thank You, Father, that You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." Why do we try to disqualify ourselves from the revelation of God's truths by becoming wise and prudent? Jesus was rejoicing that His Father didn't reveal these truths to the wise and prudent, but to babes so that the glory might go to God.

When Gideon was ready to go out against the Midianites, he was greatly outnumbered. There were at least 135,000 Midianites and he had only 32,000 men who mustered to the first call. But God said, "The people that are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, My own hand has saved me" (Judges 7:2).

You see God wants to work, but God wants the glory for the work that He does. That's why He uses the simple things of this world in order to confound the wise. People can only look on, shake their heads, and say, "I don't understand it, but God's anointing is there. God is sure using them." I wonder how many times the work that the Lord wants to do is hindered because God can't find simple men. All He finds is a bunch of Ph.D.s out there.

Now, I've been accused of being anti-intellectual—Calvary Chapel is often branded as anti-intellectual. I suppose I am guilty, but I don't apologize for it. I do believe in education. My own life has been a life of study. The Scripture tells us to "study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). I believe God uses human instruments, and He prepares the instruments He uses. I believe it's important to be prepared in the Word of God, but not from a purely natural humanistic standpoint. True education doesn't come from the wisdom of the world, but by the guidance and the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples stood before the religious council, the council marveled at their understanding of the Scripture and observed that they had been with Jesus. Likewise, when you spend time with Jesus in His Word, you will get all you need to prepare for service and for ministry. You don't need four years of seminary and a Ph.D. Many times those can be more of a hindrance than a blessing.

I believe that the title "Doctor" puts a wall between you and the people, which makes you less effective in ministering to them. People will put you on a pedestal the moment they say, "Doctor." You put yourself in a category above them and they feel inferior. Then you end up not really ministering to them on a level they can relate to.

Once a year we have a planning meeting for our annual pastors' conference. I get together with Raul Ries, Mike MacIntosh, Greg Laurie, Skip Heitzig, and several others. At the meeting we had soon after Raul and Mike got their doctoral degrees, everyone was sort of joshing them about their titles, "Dr. Raul Ries" and "Dr. Mike MacIntosh." We were giving them a bad time, and one of the fellows remarked, "Well, if you guys can just go to school and get enough education, you can probably reduce your churches to manageable sizes."

I thought that was classic—having begun in the Spirit, if you're going to try to be made perfect in the flesh, you're only going to hinder what God has done and wants to do. Having begun in the Spirit, let us continue in the Spirit! Thank God that Raul is still Raul, and Mike is still Mike—men who know their own limitations and inabilities, men who still rely wholly on the Spirit.

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

That's the only thing that's worthwhile—that you understand and know God.

That's why God chooses such totally unqualified people, fills them with His Spirit, and then does a mighty work through them that astounds and baffles the world. Now, how can we be so foolish as to try to find some reason in us to explain why God used us, so that we might glory in ourselves rather than glorying in the Lord and in what He has done?

Writing to the Corinthians Paul said, "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7 *NKJV*).

So what do you have more than anybody else? Whatever you have, you've received it as a gift from God. If you have received it, then why do you glory as though you didn't, as though you are something special?



CHAPTER TEN

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

*"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,
if ye have love one to another."*

JOHN 13:35

WITHOUT LOVE ALL the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit are meaningless and worthless. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Paul says that there are those who place a heavy emphasis on speaking in tongues, and who look at that gift as the primary evidence of the infilling or baptism of the Spirit. But if those same people don't have love, speaking in tongues is meaningless, such as a noise made by hitting a cymbal or triangle. It's just noise. It's not proof or evidence of anything.

All our doctrinal orthodoxy and understanding of the Scriptures are of no value if I don't have love. Though I understand the great mysteries, like the mystery of the Godhead, the sovereignty of God,

or the responsibility of man, if I don't have love, all my understanding is worthless. If I'm just getting in people's faces and working to make them see and believe my side, my doctrinal purity profits me nothing. It's all worthless without love.

I've come to the conclusion that it's more important that I have the right attitude than the right answer. If my answer is wrong, God can change it in a moment by the revelation of His truth. But oftentimes it takes a whole lifetime to change an attitude. Better that we have a right attitude and the wrong answers, than the right answers and the wrong attitude. Remember that the next time you get into an argument with someone over some doctrinal position or issue.

God's supreme desire for us is that we experience His love and then share that love with others. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). That's a big order.

He then said, "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21).

John said, "If a man says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20). And he questions, "How dwells the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17).

John speaks quite a bit about keeping God's commandments in his first epistle. But what is the commandment that we have heard of Him? It's that we should love one another.

As we minister to a fellowship or a group, whether it's a home Bible study or a church of 10,000 people, we need to make certain that one of our major themes is love. That love needs to be demonstrated

by our own actions, attitudes, and life. May everyone see the love of Christ manifested in us. As Paul said to Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Constantly seek to be understanding and compassionate, seeing people in and through the compassion of Jesus Christ.

The key to compassion is understanding. Ezekiel once said, "I sat where they sat" (Ezekiel 3:15). I believe that's a very good thing to try to do, at least in your own mind. Put yourself in the other man's shoes. Put yourself in his life situation. Sit where he's sitting. See it from his side. We're always seeing things only from our side, but try to look at it from his side.

Sometimes there are people who irritate us with their mannerisms or certain characteristics. I heard Dr. James Dobson once say that there was a fellow in school that he absolutely hated, and this guy hated him too. All through school they just couldn't stand each other. Some time later Dr. Dobson saw the fellow at a convention, and he knew he was going to have to face him. So, he wrote down the things that irritated him and that he disliked about the guy. Then when he met him he said, "You know, I have to confess to you that all through school I hated you." Then he started reading off all the reasons why he hated the guy. The fellow responded by saying, "Well, I hated you too and for the very same reasons!" Dr. Dobson said he looked at his list of reasons again and realized he was looking in a mirror. I find this to be very amusing.

Those traits we dislike about ourselves are the same ones that we absolutely abhor in others. We've come to tolerate and live with them in ourselves, but when we see them in others, we can't stand it. They're irritating and they upset us. Understanding is such an important component of compassion.

For years I would spend my vacations directing youth camps. It's one of my favorite experiences in life. They were the most glorious times I could have ever hoped for. My family would go too and they would have the opportunity of being able to enjoy the glorious countryside. Kay used to say, "But, Honey, you didn't get a vacation." And I would say, "Oh yes, I did."

Now, in directing youth camps you'll find there are those irritable little guys that if you say, "Sit down," they will stand up. If you say, "Stand up," they'll stay seated. If you say, "Now, we don't throw rocks at trees. They can nick the bark and the beetles can get in, so we don't throw rocks at trees," you'll invariably catch these kids throwing rocks at trees. They are always in rebellion.

I have had counselors come to me and say, "Chuck, you better move this kid to another counselor because I won't be responsible for what I do to him. I can't stand him."

So I would say, "Send him to me."

Of course, they'd grab the kid by the nape of the neck and march him in and say, "This is the one I was telling you about."

I would sit him down and give him one of my smiles, and I'd say, "What do you want to drink, Coke, Seven-Up, orange soda, or what?" I would go over to the snack shop and get him a drink and his favorite candy bar. When he's first sitting there, he's in rebellion thinking he isn't going to tell me anything. So I start breaking down his defenses. It's amazing how a candy bar and the sugar in his system will break down his defenses. I start to chip away at that wall that he has built up and I begin to show interest in him.

The dialogue usually went a little bit like this:

"Well, where are you from?"

"Black Canyon."

"Where is Black Canyon? Is that by the Verde River?"

"Yeah."

"Great. Are you in school?"

"Yeah."

"Well, tell me a little bit about your family. Where is your dad?"

"I don't have a dad."

"Oh, what happened?"

"I don't know. I've never had a dad."

"Hmm, that must be hard."

As you begin to dig, you find out that his mom works in a bar and has a different man home every night, and the kid is left on his own. The men that come home are not friendly to him, and he's learned to just stay out of the way. His mom really isn't interested in him either.

As the story begins to unfold, your heart just goes out in compassion. This poor little kid doesn't have a chance. He's built up all of this resentment and hatred against the world that he has to live in. He's learned to build up these walls. He doesn't dare let anybody get close to him. He has to protect himself. He's the only one looking out for himself. Now you have understanding. You realize why he's responding and reacting the way he is.

Then I would go back to the counselor, sit down with him, and share what's going on in this little kid's life. I wanted to give the counselor

an understanding so that he would have compassion. I would often advise the counselor to make him his helper and keep the boy close to him, giving him some responsibilities and showing him loads of attention, and giving him a lot of support. It's amazing the changes that can develop in just a week's time with compassion.

As a pastor, you're going to have people in your congregation that you'll feel the same way about. You can't stand them. But you need to have understanding. Get to know them. Get to understand where the thorn is, what's irritating them. If you seek to understand them, then as you have compassion, you can truly minister to them. You can't truly minister to anyone if you don't feel compassion towards them.

How many times do you read in the Scriptures, "And Jesus was moved with compassion," when He saw the needs of the people? He understood the need. He didn't need someone to testify to Him because He knew what was in man. It was because He had compassion. Therefore, we must seek to understand.

Jesus said to His disciples, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). The fruit of the Spirit is love. He has chosen you to bring forth this fruit.

In John 13:34, right after He told the disciples to love one another even as He has loved us, He goes on to say, "Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you: continue in My love" (John 15:8-9).

In this, we can vividly see the supremacy of love.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

STRIKING THE BALANCE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

AN IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC of Calvary Chapel fellowships is the desire not to divide God's people over non-essential issues. This isn't to say that our convictions are weak. When the Bible speaks clearly, we must as well. But on other issues we try to recognize the scriptural validity of both sides of a debate and avoid excluding or favoring one camp over the other.

An example of this is in our approach to the debatable issue concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We don't take a typical Pentecostal view nor do we take a typical Baptist view. The minute we set our position one way or the other, we have lost half of the congregation. Why would you want to lose half of the congregation? Our desire is to be able to minister to as broad a group of people as possible. The minute we start taking hard-line positions on any of the non-foundational controversial issues, we alienate part of the people.

In the essential doctrines of the faith, we must take a firm stand. But as far as the non-essential areas, in the spirit of grace we accept that people may have differing views. It's important to recognize that we can agree to disagree and still maintain a spirit of unity and love.

While we believe in the validity of the gifts of the Spirit, we don't believe in the excesses that so often accompany a freedom in the use of the gifts of the Spirit. So we avoid the controversy.

If people want to speak in tongues, we encourage them to do so in a private devotional setting to assist in communicating their love, praises, and prayers to God. We look to 1 Corinthians 14 as our biblical example. We don't insist that a person speak in tongues as the primary evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit—we believe there are other evidences that are more credible than speaking in tongues.

As Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). We don't emphasize tongues as the primary manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, instead we look for love as the fruit of the Spirit. I believe that we can stand on a solid scriptural basis doing that and, at the same time, encourage people to receive the gift of tongues. As Paul explained, we may use it for our personal prayer and devotional life, singing unto the Lord.

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupies the room of the unlearned say Amen at your giving of thanks, seeing he understands not what you say? (1 Corinthians 14:14-16).

If we're in a public assembly without an interpreter present, and someone is speaking in tongues, how is a person sitting in the seat of the unlearned going to understand? You might well be praising God, but the other people aren't edified. We need to do all things decently and in order. In this area, we don't fit in the Pentecostal category, nor do we fit in the cessionist category that would deny any valid experience of the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit today.

Another example of maintaining a balance on debatable issues is our approach to Calvinism. This is an area that people get very emotional about. We're neither Five-Point Calvinists nor are we Arminian. We do believe in the security of the believer. We don't believe that you can lose your salvation because you lost your temper or told a lie and, as a result, need to go forward next Sunday night to repent and get re-saved.

We believe in the security of the believer, but we also believe in the "perseverance of the saints." We don't believe that because you are a saint you will necessarily persevere—but that you need to persevere because you're a saint. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you (John 15:6-7).

Jesus Himself brought up the possibility of a person not abiding in Him. So we seek to take a balanced position rather than getting on one side and pressing the Five Points of Calvinism. When you take hard stands on these non-foundational issues, you'll just empty your ministry of those who have Methodist, Nazarene, and other Arminian-influenced backgrounds. Why would you want to do that?

The eternal security of the believer is a debatable issue at best. There are Scriptures on both sides. Look at John 3:16. What does "whosoever believeth in Him" mean? Does that mean that anybody can be saved? It appears to mean that, and so we don't take the hard-line Calvinistic position of limited atonement which says Jesus didn't die for everybody, only for those who would believe in Him. We do not accept that believing in Him has nothing to do with human responsibility, but is totally the sovereign choice of God.

This position states that God has ordained some to be saved and some to be lost. If God has ordained you to be lost, tough luck, buddy. There's nothing we can do. This is a denial of the free moral agency. Instead, we believe God has given us the capacity of choice so that the love we express toward Him might be meaningful and real. That's the balanced position we take.

There are people who are always trying to pigeonhole Calvary Chapel. Do you believe in eternal security? I say, "Yes, of course I believe in eternal security. As long as I abide in Christ, I'm eternally secure." Now, dispute that. If you don't abide in Christ, are you secure? Can you have security outside of Jesus Christ? I don't know of any security outside of Jesus Christ. But as long as I abide in Him, He's going to keep me from falling, to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. And no man can pluck me out of His hand. I believe that, and I experience God's security.

So often these issues come down to a matter of semantics. People end up dividing over the interpretation of a few words. We had a staff member who was very much committed to support groups. During his time with us he led many to faith in Christ. Unfortunately, we had a parting of ways that left this man bitter. He now belongs to a group called Fundamentalists Anonymous, actively encouraging people to abandon a biblically-based faith in Jesus Christ.

Is he saved? In reality, he's an enemy of Christ. If I were an Arminian, I'd say he's backslidden. If I were describing him from a Calvinist position, I would say he was never saved. I'm describing the same man, but the terms by which I describe him create the division.

The man has turned his back on Jesus Christ. It's obvious. Is he backslidden or was he ever saved? The problem is if I say he was never saved, then where's my security? How do I know I'm saved? He had the earmarks of being saved. He had a desire to serve the Lord. He was seeking to lead others to Jesus Christ. I desire to serve the Lord and I desire to lead others to Jesus Christ. So maybe I'm not saved. Now, that isn't security to me.

So, you see, it's a matter of semantics. How can I describe what I observe in a person's relationship with the Lord? The whole division is over whether I describe him as backslidden, or whether I just say he was never saved. I drive half the people out of the church because I'm going to say he's backslidden and the next guy is going to say he was never saved. Debates like these divide the church.

That's why I don't take a dogmatic position. I believe that the Scripture teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. If I take either of these positions to an extreme, to the denying of the other, then I've got a real problem because the Scriptures teach both. But then you might ask, "How can we reconcile them?" I don't. God didn't ask me to. God just asked me to believe.

When I come across a person living in fornication, in adultery, or walking after the flesh and he says, "Don't worry about me, man! I accepted Christ at a Billy Graham crusade when I was a kid," yet the person is a drunkard and a fornicator—believe me, I'm going to rattle that guy's cage as best I can. I'm going to take him to Galatians 5 where the Bible talks about the works of the flesh. At the end of

that listing the Bible declares, "As I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). I'll take him to Corinthians and to Ephesians. I'll show him where those who are living after the flesh and devoted to living after the fallen nature's desire are not going to inherit the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, if I'm speaking to saints with an oversensitive conscience who, every time they mess up and do something wrong, feel they've lost their salvation, I'm going to take them to the Scriptures that give us the assurance of God's love. I'll show them how Christ is holding them and that no man can pluck them out of the Father's hand. I'm going to take them to the passages that will give them assurance.

So the position I take on the issue all depends on the condition of the person. I can take either side and argue it *ad infinitum*. I can trade Scriptures with people on both sides of the issue. I can let you choose which side you want, and I'll take the other side. I can produce as many Scriptures and make as good an argument as you can.

So the very fact that it is an argumentative issue demonstrates that there are two sides. If we didn't have Scriptures that declare, "Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17), then you'd have no argument. But the fact is that there is the clear teaching of choice given to us by God. He expects us to make that choice.

Choose you this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:15).

How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him (1 Kings 18:21).

You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16).

There are two sides to this issue, and it's important not to get caught in a hard-line position on one side to the exclusion of the other, because then you've effectively divided your congregation.

Like every other student in Bible college, I wrestled with this issue. While reading Arthur W. Pink's *The Sovereignty of God*,¹ I became so confused because Pink states that man has no choice in the issue of salvation. It is all up to God. There's no human responsibility. I finally threw the book across the room. I felt like Martin Luther throwing an inkwell at the Devil. I was frustrated mentally.

I said, "God, I can't understand it." It was then that the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "I didn't ask you to understand it, I only asked you to believe My Word."

From that point on I rested. In my mind I still cannot rationalize the two positions—a problem many often have. But I don't have to anymore. I can be satisfied just to believe them without reducing them to the narrow limits of my intellect.

Trying to bring God within the confines of my intellect is a real lesson in frustration. Try to understand eternity. Try to understand infinity. Try to understand the limitlessness of space. Try to imagine the edge of space. We need to recognize that God is greater than the confines of our minds.

He said, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Now, if God says that His ways are beyond our finding out, then it's an exercise in futility to try.

Let's just accept the limitlessness of God. When I come to these crises points now, those places where my intellect starts to hit a dead end, I simply stand there and worship the God who is so awesome that I can't reduce Him to my understanding.

As you begin to minister, as you go through the Word, you will come across those Scriptures that speak of the sovereignty of God. When you do, teach it. When you come across those Scriptures that teach the responsibility of man, then teach that. In this way, you can be sure that you are feeding the people a well-balanced spiritual diet.



¹ *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur Pink, (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1984).

CHAPTER TWELVE

VENTURES OF FAITH

*"But without faith it is impossible to please Him:
for he that cometh to God must believe that He is,
and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."*

HEBREWS 11:6

IT'S ALWAYS EXCITING to give God a chance to work. God wants you to be a part of what He is doing. God doesn't want to stop working, so it's important for us to discover what He wants to do.

The way we discover how God wants to work is to venture out in faith. Step out and see what the Lord might do. But as we step out in faith, there has to be a guard against presumption. A lot of people make a serious mistake by falling back on human effort when God's hand obviously is not in it. Sometimes we can get so committed to something that our reputation seems to be on the line. Then we start pumping extra energy and effort into a program that wasn't of God to begin with.

I've ventured out many times only to discover that God wasn't in it. What do you do then? You retreat. What gets us into trouble is when

we proudly say, "We're going to make this thing succeed." We spend all of our energy trying to create something that God isn't a part of, and it can just rip you up. When I step out in faith, if it succeeds, I rejoice and say, "Great! The Lord led me." If it doesn't succeed, I step back and say, "I thought it was a good idea, but it sure fell on its nose." So, there are certain precautions one must take in any venture in faith.

In the Old Testament, we have the story of King Saul who established an Israeli army. He was commander over the larger part, and Jonathan was over the lesser part. It wasn't a big army, but the Philistines were determined to completely wipe out Israel.

The Philistines had amassed large forces of troops and chariots. They were such an awesome military threat that most of the Israeli army deserted and fled to the other side of the Jordan River. There were just a few men left, and they were fearful. One night Jonathan awoke with what must have been either a troubling thought or an exciting thought. *If God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel, He doesn't need the whole army. If God wants to work, He can work with one man as easily as 100,000 men.*

Now, when you stop to think about that from a logical standpoint, it's really true. God doesn't need a whole army. All God needs is one person in harmony with His purpose. God can accomplish His desires through one man. That's both challenging and exciting. That thought kept Jonathan awake until he finally woke up his armorbearer and said, "Let's go over and see if God wants to deliver the Philistines to Israel today."

So they took a venture in faith. It's having a mindset that says, "Let's see what God might want to do today." It's simply making yourself available.

But Jonathan set up a safeguard.

Then Jonathan said, "Very well, let us cross over to [these] men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up. For the LORD has delivered them into our hand, and this [will be] a sign to us" (1 Samuel 14:8-10 NKJV).

Jonathan left the matter open. He didn't presumptuously tear into the Philistines because he thought, *God is going to be with us and we're going to wipe them out.* There was a certain amount of precaution.

If I don't know for sure, a little precaution is always wise. The Bible is full of stories of people who ventured out in faith, giving God an opportunity to do what He intended to do, simply by making themselves available to Him.

Several years ago, we heard that the radio station KWVE was up for sale. At that time we were being broadcast on KYMS, providing them with the financial funding and visibility needed to get them started. The station president had bought the station in order to bring Christian radio to Orange County, and *The Word For Today* was originally the station's anchor program. But when new ownership took over, they decided to go to a contemporary music format and eliminate the Bible teaching programs. So we went on KBRT, but they were extremely expensive.

When we heard that KWVE was up for sale, we decided, "Let's just make them an offer and see what the Lord will do. If the Lord wants us to have it, they'll accept the offer and it will work out." We gave God a chance to work. We asked God, "Do You want a radio station in Orange County that will broadcast worship music and Bible teaching? Do You desire that?"

We were willing to venture out and give God a chance. It was solely an act of faith. We weren't going to negotiate. We were just going to give them a figure. Then they said, "We have others interested too." And we said, "Fine." High pressure sales tactics won't work when you're committed to the Lord.

We prayed, "Well, Lord, if You want it, fine, and if not, that's fine too." They accepted the offer and today we have KWVE providing a glorious ministry. Interestingly, it is also showing a profit, and yet we charge one-third the cost of broadcasting compared to other religious stations in the area. We can air our ministry partners' programs for much less and give them a good audience. God has blessed KWVE because we stepped out and said, "God, if this is what You want, we will take the step of faith and make the offer."

But there was also a TV station that came up for sale and we put in an offer. We saw it as an opportunity for the Lord to televise what we call representative Christianity. Our bid wasn't accepted so we just walked away from it. We didn't push and we didn't get ahead of the Lord. If God wanted us to have it, He would have made it available, and if not, we weren't going to strive or negotiate. So stepping out in faith and seeing what God wants to do is what you might call testing the waters.

A few years ago we realized we needed a larger facility for our Bible college, which was located at the Twin Peaks Conference Center at the time. Twin Peaks needed the entire conference center to house the school, so we weren't able to continue our regular conferences along with the Bible college. Then a large, beautiful ranch property owned by the Los Angeles Rescue Mission in Vista became available.

We put a deposit on it, but many members of the Vista city council who lived near the property started a media drive against us. We

decided not to fight it and we backed away from the deal. A realtor, who saw the notice in the paper that we had cancelled escrow, called us and said he happened to have a listing in Murrieta Hot Springs, which had not yet been made public. We looked at the property and we could see the potential there. We made a low-ball offer on it and said, "If the Lord's in it, we'll get it." And we got it.

The interesting thing, though, is that we wanted the facility next door to Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa for many years. This six-story office building was originally offered to us for eighteen million dollars. Previously we had made an offer for ten million and they said, "No, it's worth more than that." Then someone came forward and put together a deal with the major tenant. The property was then offered to us for 8.9 million. So we really saw the hand of the Lord in that, as we got the building for a million dollars less than we had offered.

If we had bought the building next door first, we would have never purchased the property in Murrieta Hot Springs. We wouldn't have been in the position to buy it. So we can see the hand of God in the whole process. He wanted us to have both properties, and He orchestrated the timing.

We were taking baby steps, and the Lord wanted us to take a giant step. You keep going forward, and as long as the Lord opens the door, you just keep moving ahead. There is always a sense of daring in a step of faith. You dare to step out to see what the Lord might want to do. But again, if God isn't in it, don't fight Him. Don't press or manipulate. We don't want to force things. If God is in it, it's going to go His way. It's going to go smoothly and we're not going to have to make compromises.

When Greg Laurie took over our Monday night Bible study, God began to really bless him and the ministry. We saw young people

coming forward every Monday night to receive Christ. I called Greg in and said, "Greg, why don't we see if we can get a week this summer at the Pacific Amphitheater. Let's get a larger facility to see what God might do if we had more room. We're overflowing the place on Monday night and we don't have room for everybody. So why don't we try the Pacific Amphitheater?"

That was in April, and Greg didn't think we had enough time to do it. He said, "You can't do it now!" And I said, "Why not? Let's see if they have a week available. Let's just see what God might want to do with a larger venue."

We called the Pacific Amphitheater and they had a week available that summer, and we decided to call the event Harvest Crusade. We were absolutely overjoyed because it was so glorious. The last night the amphitheater actually had to close the gates because there wasn't any more seating available. They set up loud speakers outside so the people who couldn't get in could hear. And it's just grown and developed from there—but it began with a simple step of faith. "Let's see what God might want to do. Let's give God a chance to work. Let's step out." We might risk a few dollars, but as the saying goes, "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Another classic Old Testament example of stepping out in faith took place when the city of Samaria was being besieged by the Syrians. The conditions had become so bad in Samaria that they were selling the jawbone of a donkey for sixty-five pieces of silver and dove's dung for five pieces of silver. The women had turned to cannibalism. One woman cried out to the king pleading for help, but he answered, "How can I help you? I don't have food on my own table." She said, "This woman and I made an arrangement to eat our babies, and we boiled my baby and ate it, and now she has hid her baby. So make her produce it so we can eat it." The king tore his clothes and said, "God

help me if I don't get the head of that prophet, Elisha!" (2 Kings 6:24-33). He was blaming God for all these problems.

Elisha was a prophet who had amazing spiritual insight and such a close communion with God that he was surprised when God didn't show him things. Now, every once in a while God has shown me something, but I'm always shocked and surprised when He does. But Elisha was so tuned in that he was surprised when God didn't show him things.

Elisha was in his house with his friends when all of a sudden he says, "The king is sending a guy down here to get my head. So when he knocks on the door, you guys open it and pin him with the door. For behold, the feet of his master are right behind him."

Pretty soon there was a knock on the door. Elisha's friends opened it, pinned the guy against the door, and held him there. Then the king came riding up with the prime minister and said, "I finally got you! You've troubled Israel long enough."

Elisha replied, "I'm not the one who has troubled Israel. You're the one who has troubled Israel by bringing in the worship of Baal. You're the one to blame!"

He went on to say, "Don't worry. Tomorrow by this time, they will be selling a bushel of fine flour in the gates of Samaria for sixty-five cents." The prime minister scoffed at the promise of God saying, "Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" And Elisha said, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shall not eat thereof" (2 Kings 7:1-2).

Why did the prime minister stagger at the promises of God? Because he tried to figure out humanly how God could do it. Many times that's when we get into trouble. We can't see how God can do it.

We've tried and plotted every way and concluded that it's impossible. We're prone, just like the prime minister, to say, "If God should open windows of heaven, could such a thing be?" Elisha said, "You'll see it, but you won't eat it." God's going to do His work, but because of your unbelief, you won't be able to benefit from the work of God.

The story continues with four leprous men who lived in a garbage heap outside of the city of Samaria. Because of their leprosy, they weren't allowed to enter the city. They ate the garbage thrown over the wall, but because of the famine in the city they were starving. One of them looked at the others and said, "Why sit here until we die? Let's go over to the camp of the Syrians and maybe they will have mercy on us and give us a crust of bread that we might live or maybe they will kill us. But so what? We're going to die anyway" (2 Kings 7:3). They began a venture in faith that was premised on the sliver of a hope that maybe they would be given a crust of bread or maybe they wouldn't.

I'm amazed that many churches don't come to this same place, as the few people left look around at each other. I'm surprised they don't say, "Well, why do we just sit here until we die? Let's do something. Maybe it will work and maybe it won't. But if it doesn't, it won't matter because we're dying anyhow. Let's venture out."

I think of all the ventures of faith that have been made throughout history on just that kind of a premise. Who knows what God might be wanting to do? Let's step out. Let's find out. Let's give God a chance.

The story of Elisha concludes when the Syrians heard noises they interpreted as the chariots of Egypt. They thought the king had hired Egyptians as mercenaries, and panic broke out. They fled, and by the time the four lepers came to the first tent, they found supper on a table, but no one was there to eat it. So they ate and grabbed all the treasures. They went to the next tent and found the same thing. As

they were grabbing the loot, one of them said, "Hey, fellows! We'd better let them know in town what God has done. If we just hide this and hoard it for ourselves, mischief will come to us."

When they returned to the city, they cried to the guard on the wall, "The camp of the Syrians is empty. There's plenty of food for everybody. Go tell the king. When the report came to the king, he said, "It's a trap. Those clever Syrians know how hungry we are, so they're waiting in the shadows for us to come pouring out of the city. Then they're going to pounce and kill us. Don't let anybody out of the city. Keep the city gates barred."

I think of the tragedy and the cost of unbelief. It keeps us from partaking even when God has provided abundantly. I have met people who have that kind of mentality. They always think it's a trap of some kind. It's too good to be true and there has to be a hitch to it. When God is working, they're afraid to venture out.

There's a passage of Scripture that has meant very much to me through the years. Second Chronicles 14 begins the story of the reign of King Asa over Judah. He was twenty-five years old when he ascended to the throne. Shortly after the beginning of his reign, the Ethiopians invaded the land, joining together with a confederacy of other nations with an army of a million men plus chariots.

When Asa received the report of this huge invading army, he prayed unto the Lord and said, "Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest in You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let no man prevail against You" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

I like this. He wasn't saying, "God, I have a plan and I want you to bless it." He wasn't saying, "God, I have it all figured out. Now, bless

our program." It wasn't, "God, get on my side." Instead it was, "God, I'm coming on Your side. In Your name we're going to go out against them. Don't let man prevail against You. They aren't going to prevail against me, because I don't have anything. I don't have any power. But Lord, that doesn't make any difference to You. I'm going out in Your name. Don't let them prevail against You. They can beat me, but don't let them beat You."

This is similar to what Jonathan said. God doesn't need a whole army. God can just do it with one man. It's what Paul said in Romans 8:31, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

God gave Asa the victory over the Ethiopians. As Asa was coming back, the prophet of the Lord came out to meet him, and the Lord said through the prophet, "Hear Me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while you be with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2).

As he began his reign as king over Judah, Asa received this great word from the Lord.

Under the reign of Asa, the kingdom was prosperous and the people were blessed. But toward the latter part of his reign, when he was wealthy, prosperous, and successful, the northern kingdom of Israel decided to invade Judah. They began to build fortified cities north of Jerusalem. They prepared to set up a siege prior to attacking Judah.

When Asa saw them building their fortified cities, he realized what their plan was and took money out of the temple treasury. He sent it to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, to hire the Syrians to attack Israel from the north. The Syrians came down from the Golan Heights and began to attack the northern part of Israel.

Looking at the outcome, it seems that the strategy was successful. It worked. Asa was no doubt smug and enjoyed his brilliant strategy. Money can do wonderful things, and he was glorying in hiring the Syrians. They're mercenaries and can protect us. What a successful strategy. And then Hanani the prophet came out and talked to Asa.

You have relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:7-9).

When you were little and had no strength and you were faced with the invading army of the Ethiopians, you trusted in the Lord and the Lord delivered you. Your trust was in Him. But now that you've grown powerful and strong, you're trusting in your own devices. Don't you know "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him"?

That's the key. The eyes of the Lord are going to and fro throughout the entire earth to find men whose hearts are in harmony with His so that He might show Himself strong on their behalf.

The prophet is saying that God has a work He desires to do, and God is simply looking for people who are in harmony with Him in order that He might show Himself strong on their behalf.

The key is to discover what God wants to do. I've found the best way is by just stepping out. Try it and see. Maybe God will work. Maybe God wants to work. Let's give Him a chance.

But again, always have the attitude, "If it doesn't work, let's not push it." Maintain that flexibility of being able to walk away from a project. If it's obvious that it isn't working, then let's not push it and try to make it work.

We see the same idea in the story of Esther when Mordecai told her to go see the king. She said, "You just don't go in and see him. You must be called. You're putting your life on the line to go in if you're not called." Mordecai replied, "You think if this decree goes through, you're going to escape? Maybe God has risen you up for such a time as this. If you fail, deliverance will arise in another quarter."

The nation of Israel can't be wiped out, because through it, the Messiah is going to come. You must have the confidence that God's purposes will stand. Though you fail, deliverance will arise from another quarter. God will do the work, but you have the opportunity to be the vessel through which God works.

I believe that's often the case. God has a work that He desires to do, and you can choose to be a participant. You can be the vessel if you dare. With Esther, it was a daring thing to go in uncalled by the king. If he doesn't raise the scepter, she immediately gets killed.

Several years ago there was a book written called *The Gospel Blimp*.² It was so typical of the church programs devised by men to build a church's attendance. It's amazing to see all of the church growth programs, devices, and schemes that people buy into.

The idea was to put an invitation to attend the church on a blimp. They then put it on a cable and let it just fly above the church to let people know that the church was there. They even put the message, "Jesus Loves You" on the blimp. The problems they had keeping the blimp afloat make for a classic story.

One day a storm came through and the men were out there trying to hold it. They ended up getting into a big fight with each other and it ultimately split the church. Half the people left, angry at the other half. That's so true of man's efforts. Rather than bringing gain to the church, they incurred a loss. Early on, when they saw that the blimp wasn't working, they said, "Oh, but we spent fifteen hundred dollars for it. We have to keep it afloat." They should have accepted it was a mistake, forgotten it, and let the thing blow away in the wind. Let's not try to hold onto what God is wanting to blow away.

Several years ago I went down to Lubbock, Texas to speak at a Southern Baptist church. The pastor said they had decided they weren't going to keep any program alive in the church by artificial means. In other words, they weren't going to put on life-support systems and try to keep things alive that were dying.

This is a frequent mistake the church has made. There's a time when God uses a particular kind of a program, but then that time passes. Unfortunately, it's become a tradition for people to try to keep it alive. They pump life-support systems into it and attempt to keep it going. With God's help we learn to let things die a natural death instead of trying to keep things going by artificial means.

It's always a sign of degeneration when we look at the past to see what God has done, rather than being able to say, "Look at what God is doing today." Instead of just hearing what God has done, it's important we become a vital part of the work and experience and see the work of God for ourselves. Otherwise, it won't go on. We need to make each succeeding generation a first generation as far as the experience of the work of God is concerned. In that way, it's being continued. When we build a monument to remind ourselves of what God did in the past, that's always a sad day. We each need to experience the work of God alive and afresh in our own lives.

There was a time when God was using the Saturday night concerts at Calvary Chapel in a glorious way. These concerts were the greatest evangelistic tool that we had going. The place was jammed on those nights. We had a lot of bands and hundreds of kids coming forward to accept Jesus Christ every Saturday night. If you took a poll in Southern California on where people were saved, you'd find that many were saved at a Saturday night concert at Calvary Chapel. There was a time when God was using these concerts, but then that time passed.

A couple of years ago, there were some who said that they wanted to try Saturday night concerts again. I said, "Okay, go for it." But the time had passed. For a while they tried to keep them going, but it was as if God had said, "No, that era is over." Now, that doesn't mean it won't come again sometime, but rather than going on and on and seeing the thing slowly lose its life, it's best to cancel it. Let it go. Let it die. Don't try to keep it going.

Take a step in faith. If it works, rejoice. If it doesn't, look for something else. Give God the opportunity. I believe strongly in giving God an opportunity, and when it works, glorious! But when it doesn't work, you haven't really gotten that deeply into it so that you can't just walk away and say, "Well, it sure looked like a great idea, didn't it?" Don't lock yourself onto it and get yourself in so deep that you can't walk away.

Be led by the Spirit and don't be afraid to follow. And having begun in the Spirit, don't seek to be made perfect in the flesh. I do see this as a problem, even among some of the guys that were with us at the beginning. God has blessed their ministry, but unfortunately they've gotten much more organized. They're now beginning to direct the program and with it they're losing something that's vital. Having begun in the Spirit, don't seek to be perfected in the flesh. It's always a mistake.

I thank God He has given us a lot of pastors who caught this vision of simply venturing out in faith. I watch them as they're making these ventures in faith. It's a thrill to see how God is blessing when we dare to step out and allow Him to do what He wants to do, giving ourselves over as instruments through which He can do what He so desires.

The key is making ourselves available. The eyes of the Lord are still going to and fro throughout the entire earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him. Discover the will of God and then jump into it. Get your heart in harmony with His, and you will be amazed at what God will do and how God will bless.



² *The Gospel Blimp and Other Modern Parables* by Joseph Bayly (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing, 2002).

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